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# CHURCH POLITY;

ITS

SPIRITUAL GROUNDS

AND

## CONGREGATIONAL SUPERSTRUCTURE.

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY R. ANDERSON, D.D.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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CONGREGATIONALISTS should be familiar with the principles of Congregationalism. If we have a right to exist as a denomination; if our polity is, as we believe, the best fitted to develop the individual life and character of believers, and to secure the wisest and largest discipline of the varied faculties of mind and heart, — it cannot be amiss to realize the fact, and to understand the reasons for it.

This work of Mr. Fleming is a valuable addition to Congregational literature. It is not a controversial work, nor a book of forms or statistics, but of life and principles. It shows that the usages and forms of Congregationalism are the natural expression of the Christian life; that Congregationalism is simple, natural, and truthful, not only to Scripture, but to the necessities of the Christian heart.

The work is both philosophical and practical, — philosophical, because it goes to the bottom of the subject ; and practical, because by its simple common sense it solves many a vexed question of church forms, and by its warm Christian spirit deepens our love for Him whose kingdom it is the aim of our denomination to build up upon the most enduring basis. As a practical exponent of Congregationalism, it comes up to the spirit and demands of the age, and will be welcomed by those who long for the universal extension of the Redeemer's kingdom.

This little volume is understood to be the condensed result of years of study and careful observation. Mr. Fleming has not been known as a writer beyond the circle of his ministerial brethren, save by an occasional article for the newspaper press, or for some one of the reviews, though long esteemed for his good thoughts and his Christian spirit. It is in the hope of doing service to the church that he invites attention to the work now offered to the public.

R. ANDERSON.

BOSTON, Jan. 2, 1868.

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## PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

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**R**ESPECTING the organization, forms, and historical affairs of the Christian Church, there has been no lack of learned research and of polemic discussion. But, by most writers, far less attention than is meet has been given to the essential inward life of the church, which is spiritual; and particularly to the necessary relation which that life bears to the forms of its manifestation, and its influence in predetermining those forms. It seems to have been forgotten, or denied altogether, that the religion of Christ is of a divine and heavenly nature, and the Church of Christ a kingdom not of this world, — not instituted, like civil government, to control and regulate merely the outward actions and the temporal interests of mankind, and that by a power wielded over men, but not operating in them. Whereas, on the contrary, the Church of Christ is an institution growing out of the religion of Christ; which is essentially spiritual in its origin, efficiency, and sphere of operation, and is designed chiefly to promote

the spiritual life and moral welfare of man as an immortal being. It is really what it was often denominated by Christ, "The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom within you," making itself visible on earth through the divine work of human redemption.

To this radical mistake, it is believed, we must attribute many of the dissensions and divisions which have so long and grievously afflicted Christianity and the Christian Church. It would seem to be wise and desirable, therefore, that we should revert to the first principles of our holy religion on this subject; and endeavor to obtain from the inward life of the church just views of its origin, organization, membership, religious services, and, indeed, of its entire history. And, without presuming to ignore or disparage whatever views others have taken from other standpoints,—as those from Christian Antiquity, the Fathers ancient and modern, Precedents, Common Usage, and the like,—the author can not but think that the standpoint taken in the following postulate is pre-eminently the true one in church polity,—one entirely in accord with the spirit of Christianity and the Word of God, and the only one worthy of Christian men and Protestants. Moreover, it is the only one which common Christians, unlearned in the schools, can appreciate as sound and convincing.

The fundamental principle, then, assumed in these pages on the subject of Church Polity, is this

## POSTULATE :

*The Christian religion is essentially spiritual.*

But here it is all important that the import of the term *spiritual*, as used in the postulate and in these pages, should be rightly apprehended. Its import here is that which the word bears in the Holy Scriptures when used in relation to the Spirit of God, his agency and influences in the renewed hearts and minds of the people of God. The work of the Holy Spirit, and the gracious affections thereby produced in the Christian heart, furnish our assumed first principles on the subject before us, — these, as given in the word of God, and realized in an enlightened Christian experience. In this generic sense of the term, we say the religion of Christ is essentially spiritual.

It is, therefore, a religion essentially internal, having its birthplace and its permanent life in the renewed inner man. Yet by the laws of man's social nature, and by the laws of its own vital activity, and no less by the law of its own loving nature, the religion of the heart must ever tend to act outwardly, and to manifest itself by its own appropriate fruits, — those of piety toward God and benevolence to all mankind.

This religion, being spiritual, is supernatural in its origin and character. It is neither the natural development of any inherent power or goodness in man — certainly not in fallen man ; nor is it the product of any human wisdom, skill, or education (John i. 12, 13). It takes its origin in us from the birth of which Christ discoursed to Nicodemus. It is maintained in continuance and in growth by the Spirit of God, who dwelleth and worketh in us both to will and to do ; while we, too, by his grace, are freely working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. And when the work of grace is perfected in us, the same spiritual life and religion is perpetuated as eternal life in heaven.

The truth and reality of such a religion every person must find out for himself, and in himself. The possibility of it no man can deny who believes in his own existence as a rational being, diverse from and above the brutes. No man can deny it who intelligently looks in upon his own moral being, made originally in the likeness of God who is a Spirit, and is even yet, though fallen, under law and owing allegiance to God, — the God of conscience. No man will deny it who finds in himself a law warring against the law of his mind, bringing him into bondage and forcing him to cry out, “ Who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death ? ” And no man can rationally

doubt the reality, the spiritual power, and the beneficent character, of the religion of Christ, who candidly weighs the evidences of Christianity furnished by its history as a power in the world, or who looks at the great change which it has produced in the lives of its true and faithful professors, such as the Apostle Paul and many others.

But, by its very nature, spiritual religion is neither an object for direct cognizance by any of our senses, nor is the human understanding, judging of things according to the senses, a proper judge of its nature and mode of operation. It can be seen and known in ourselves only by self-consciousness, and the eye of self-reflection looking inward on our own religious experiences; and even that, only so far as we have it and live in the spirit of it. He who is born of God hath the witness in himself; and with this the recorded experiences of the saints of all ages, especially those recorded by the inspired penmen, become to him a reflex image, an answering echo, of the spiritual life and religion of his own soul.

It is otherwise with the "natural man." He receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. Hence the religion of the unrenewed, the natural man, if he has any, becomes only Naturalism, Rationalism, Formalism, Superstition, or Delusion, — ac-

according to his own internal state, or outward antecedents and circumstances. He misunderstands the true nature of the Christian religion, misinterprets the word of God and history respecting it, and so misconceives the true idea of the church of the living God. If "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," how can he understand that kingdom, its nature, its life, and its history?

Our ultimate appeal, therefore, is to those who are born of God and spiritually minded; in whose inward life and conscious religious experience our postulate finds its verification, and the word of God its true interpretation respecting the Christian religion and church.

# CHURCH POLITY.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE CHURCH, — ITS ORIGIN AND DISTINCTIONS.

PROPOSITION. — *The Church of the living God on earth is a sacred community, deriving its origin and its continued existence from the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.*

**M**ANKIND by nature are all spiritually dead; and, until renewed by the Spirit of God, are all alienated from the life and the love of God in their souls. If left to themselves, all would inevitably perish for ever in sin and misery, hateful and hating one another.

But God, in great mercy, has not left the race of man to perish without a remedy. The remedy is provided and offered to all in the gospel. The special remedy for guilt is, “The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of



the world ;” and the same is the procuring cause of all our salvation. The special remedy for the spiritual death, depravity, and pollution of our souls, is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. By his mysterious divine agency, through the influence of divine truth in the consciences of those who give heed to the truth, some are awakened to a sense of their sin and guilt, and made to cry out for mercy. Through faith they obtain mercy, and find pardon and life in Christ Jesus. They are born of the Spirit, and become now the children of God in spirit and in truth (John i. 12, 13). Thenceforward they become new creatures in Christ Jesus: “old things pass away, all things become new.” A new heart and a new spirit are now given to them. New joys and sorrows, new hopes and fears, the various lights and shades of religious life, now fill up the remnant of their days on earth ; and then they join the company of the redeemed in heaven, to enjoy life eternal there.

Such is the great change effected by the work of divine grace in them,—a work substantially alike in all who experience it ; a work, there-



fore, making a deep and broad line of distinction between those born of God and the whole world that lieth in wickedness (1 John v. 19). Though previously children of wrath by nature, even as others, now they are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God,” — the household of God, in other words, the church of the living God. Thus the church is not an artificial formation, but a natural and necessary result of the work of divine grace, a brotherhood of all who are born of God.

Even were there no other and higher principle to operate in the case than the mere instincts of our social nature, these of themselves would naturally draw together, and combine into one sacred community or communities, all those who had experienced the same great inward change. By social sympathy they would live and act together as circumstances might permit; mutually blessing and being blessed in their fellowship. And thus, in point of fact, sanctified social affections are the inward organs of spiritual church life.

But, more than this, the nature and require-

ments of true spiritual life and religion demonstrate the necessity of the church's existence. True religion is at once spiritual life, and holy divine love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. But love is an affection of the heart essentially social. It must have an object on which to bestow its genial warmth and offices of loving kindness; and it naturally seeketh such as are of kindred spirit and heart on whom to bestow them. This is truly and eminently so within the sphere of our holy religion. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus is love, — love supreme to God our heavenly Father, and love to the brotherhood of all who bear his moral image. Faith works by love. As saith the Apostle John, "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God; . . . for God is love" (1 John iv. 7, 8). "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." — 1 John iii. 14.

Thus it appears, that true spiritual religion is of a loving nature, and hence can not exist without loving the brotherhood of those in whom is seen the image of the Father, as reproduced by

the Spirit of the living God. Thus, spiritual life, as love, predetermines the existence of the church beloved ; yea, requires it for its own existence ; and, more, in its very exercise, presupposes the church as already in existence. Thus, through the work of the Spirit, the church would have had an existence, independently of any prescription ordaining its existence.

In accordance with these deductions from the social nature of man and of true spiritual religion, we find historically, that true religion and the church appear simultaneously in every age. Nowhere in the Bible do we find any thing like an express statute or charter given to men for the institution of the church of God in this world ; though we find much that presupposes such an institution already in the world. Indeed, to whom could such a charter be given but to the church already existing, at least in its essential elementary condition ? Nor did Christ while on earth organize any church of his disciples, but obviously assumed that the church would exist wherever it would be needed, and would spontaneously come into being wherever

the gospel of the grace of God should be preached and received by faith. And, in point of fact, the primitive churches of Christ were so formed, under the labors and guidance of the apostles and others. It is a gratuitous assumption to suppose that they had specific directions for the formation of Christian churches, as Moses had in the formation of the Jewish theocracy.

The church of God, therefore, is not an institution of express appointment or legislative formation, but an organic product of true spiritual religion planted in the hearts of men by the grace of God. It has existed from the beginning, and has been essentially the same church, as true religion has been, through every age and change of dispensation. On its first altar Abel, by faith, offered his more acceptable sacrifice. "When men began to call on the name of the Lord," or rather to be called by the name of the Lord, the line of distinction began to be drawn between "the sons of God and the sons of men," — between the church and the world. The true Israel, the true church, continued onward in the line of true piety through

the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations. After the coming of Christ, the church spread among the nations, along with the gospel of the grace of God. The church of God now exists wherever God, by his grace, has redeemed for himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works: and so will it continue to exist, and to extend with the spreading gospel to the ends of the earth and the end of time; and then, as the church triumphant, it will exist for ever.

The church of the living God, thus far considered, is distinctively denominated *the church universal*; consisting of all on earth, at any one time, who are born of God, and worship the Father in spirit and in truth. And this is but a portion, *in transitu*, of the whole church of the redeemed, "the general assembly of the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven" (Heb. xii. 23). Of the church universal, Christ, enthroned on the right hand of the Father, is the great and only Head. For the edification of his church in truth and holiness, he hath given it the Holy Scriptures, the ministry of the Word, the ordinances of divine service, and

the promised Holy Spirit to be with the church until he come again (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17; 1 Cor. xii. 28; Ephes. iv. 11-13; Matt. xxviii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 23-26; John xiv. 16, 17, 26).

It is usually called also the church invisible; because it has no outward visible organization over all the earth, and never can be all assembled in one place. It is, however, visible to Him who knoweth the hearts of all men, and whose eye seeth under the whole heaven (2 Tim. ii. 19).

But our chief practical interest in Church Polity is with particular local and visible churches. A *particular church* is a company of true believers in Christ, publicly associated together as disciples of Christ, and meeting statedly in one place to worship God for their own mutual spiritual improvement, and for the promotion of the cause and kingdom of Christ in the world.

Particular local churches, however, are not to be regarded as different independent institutions, really separate from the church of the living God on earth already considered, but as parts of that great whole, as branches of the great and



good olive-tree (Rom. xi. 24). A company of unbelievers can, under no circumstances, be truly and really a church of Christ, such as those in Corinth, Philippi, and elsewhere. True Christians must be the constituent elements of a true Christian church. Particular local churches are, and must needs be, composed of persons drawn together by the same sanctified social affections, and be actuated by the same spirit and law of brotherly love, as before stated in regard to the whole invisible church on earth. But of necessity, obviously, they must be limited in extent, localized by the circumstance of residence in the same place or vicinity, and organized and meeting by themselves publicly and visibly, in order that they may accomplish the several ends of Christian and church fellowship, as before stated.

The true bond of union in every particular church also is spiritual. True, the formal bond of the outward organization is visible, seen in the formula of Christian faith and church covenant adopted by the church. But these presuppose the true spiritual faith and fellow-

ship of Christ to be written already in their hearts by the Spirit of all truth and grace. Otherwise, the formal bond is but a piece of solemn mockery. Here, as in all that is truly Christian, the spiritual must be the foundation of the formal.

Yet some formula of Christian faith and church fellowship—written or oral, expressed or implied,—is indispensable in the formation of a church that would be visible and public in the world, in order that the members of it may, by assent thereunto, recognize each other as believers in the gospel, and that other churches, and that the world also, may recognize them as a church of Christ (Matt. v. 13–16).

The formula of faith, the creed of a church, is simply a concise exposition of the great fundamental doctrines of the gospel, set forth in their relations to vital godliness. Such a creed, sincerely professed, is a test of Christian character. Those who truly love and believe in God love and believe in divine truth. It serves as a harmonizing bond of union in the church, as a



sharp, discriminating line between the church and the world, as a public testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus; and, on the ground of Christian wisdom and prudence, no body of men ought to be recognized as a church of Christ, without some satisfactory exposition of its faith.

The formal covenant or constitution of a church, also, is important as an exposition of the duties belonging to the church relation. But the written or oral form by no means creates the duties, or imposes them on the members of a church. They grow out of the Christian life, and are imposed by the great Head of the church. The formal covenant simply specifies and makes prominent the most important of them to be noticed under the circumstances; and the assent of the church jointly and severally to them is simply a public acknowledgment that these and all other vows of God are upon them, and a promise, that, by the help of divine grace, they will faithfully perform them.

Again: the official action and sanction of

some ecclesiastical council, presbytery, or prelate may be thought indispensable to the formation of a church. Such action is indeed important, and on prudential grounds indispensable, to Christian fellowship among churches; and in all cases, in the midst of other churches, should never be dispensed with. Christian prudence is of moral obligation on all churches as well as persons. But the sole legitimate aim and end of such action, and its sole "validity," is to examine into the life and faith of those who propose to be formed into a church, and wish to share in the fellowship of other churches. And when satisfied on this point of inquiry, as also on the expediency of forming a church then and there, the ecclesiastical council, presbytery, or prelate, is then bound by the fellowship of Christ to recognize the new church as a local branch of the Church of Christ on earth, and to give it the right hand of Christian church fellowship, not only formally at the time, but practically ever afterwards.

A particular local and visible church of Christ, as thus far considered, is really and truly a

church, yet by no means completely organized, and furnished with all the organs and means designed for its work and mission in the world. The ministry of the word, the pastoral office, the worship of God, and the sacraments of the church, are yet wanted. These will be considered in the sequel.

From the whole view now taken of the origin of the church universal, and of particular churches, it follows, that all who have experienced the work of renewing grace are solemnly bound to unite publicly with some visible church of Christ. Nay, more: it follows, that those who truly have the spirit of Christ in them will spontaneously, by the very impulses of that Spirit, seek the fellowship of God's people in the church relation. The commands of Christ are laid upon them so to do (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18). No one has any reason to indulge the Christian hope who is unwilling to confess Christ before the world, and live publicly as one of his disciples (Matt. x. 32). The evidences of piety sufficient to warrant one in indulging a hope in Christ are sufficient to warrant one to unite with the church, though

in neither case they may be sufficient to remove all doubt and misgivings. If our faith be as a grain of mustard-seed, it will grow; and the church, the Lord's vineyard, is the place for it to grow, under the promised care and culture of the divine Husbandman.

## CHAPTER II.

## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

PROPOSITION. — *Regenerate persons are the only true members of a Christian Church.*

THIS proposition relates expressly to visible churches of Christ, which have a public, formal organization, and the administration of whose affairs is in the hands of men. The keys of admission into membership are in the hands of those who can not inspect the heart, and judge with certainty, in any case, whether it is in a regenerate or unregenerate state. Hence, in all such churches, there may be, probably there are, those who have a name to live while they are dead. It was so in the primitive churches, under the eyes of the apostles even, as witness the case of Simon Magus and others (Acts viii. 13–23; Jude 4; 1 Cor. v. 13). Our Lord's parable of the tares among the wheat

(Matt. xiii. 24, &c.) was an intimation that “the children of the wicked one” would be found among “the children of the kingdom.” And his solemn asseveration (Matt. vii. 21–23), “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,” contains the same intimation.

Now, respecting this class of persons, — the unregenerate who may have been formally admitted by men into a Christian church, — the question is here raised, Are they truly and really members of the church, or only nominally so, through the mistaken judgment, or erroneous principles, of the church admitting them? And this leads on to the fundamental question, What is the true principle of church membership, by which every church should be governed in the admission of members?

The proposition at the head of this chapter seems to us to set forth the only true principle of membership in a Christian church. Regenerate persons are the only true members who really constitute a Christian church.

If it be admitted that particular churches are

but branches of the great and good olive-tree, — the invisible church; and not separate and independent institutions, intended to embrace a mixed membership, — then the proposition is at once admitted. The true membership of the parts must be the same as that of the whole. If the premise here is denied, the proof of the contrary should be produced by those who maintain the contrary.

But even to suppose the contrary is sufficient to set it aside. For if, in any case or in any way, unregenerate persons can be made true and real members of the church, in every case it might be so, and the whole church be made up of unregenerate members: and so we should have a Christian church, without a Christian in it; and might have Christian churches all over the earth, and yet not a Christian in all the world. But this, logically true, is absurd and impossible.

Again: if the membership may rightfully be a mixed one, what proportion must the tares bear to the wheat, in order that the church may still be a Christian church? And, even then, the question returns, Are they the tares, or the



wheat, that are the true, real, and constituent members of it? . These suppositions are not altogether imaginary or hypothetical. Churches have become extinct by a process of degeneracy, not for want of nominal members, but through the utter loss of spiritual life and the true faith (Rev. ii. 5). The living faithful few, in such cases, constitute the church until they die, or come out from the corrupt majority, which then is no church at all, but a synagogue of Satan.

Moreover, there is a manifest incongruity, a palpable inconsistency, in a mixed membership of believers and unbelievers, alike repugnant to the word of God and the spirit of our holy religion. "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple [THE CHURCH] of the living God. . . Wherefore, come out from among them, *and be ye separate*, saith the Lord," &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14-18).



None other than true Christians are qualified for the duties of Christian church membership. They alone can worship the Father in spirit and in truth. They alone in whom the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost can love one another with pure hearts, fervently and unfeignedly, as brethren in Christ. None other are, or can be, the objects of that holy, complacent regard which God is said to bear towards his church. None other can fulfill the church's mission, to be "the light of the world and the salt of the earth." None other can warrant the distinguishing epithets, and the forms of address, bestowed by the inspired penman of the New Testament,— terms and epithets, be it noticed, bestowed on particular visible churches, at Rome, Philippi, and other places; such as "Brethren, holy and beloved,— partakers of the heavenly calling,— elect of God,— sanctified in Christ Jesus," and the like. Such epithets are appropriate to churches of true Christians only, notwithstanding there may have been unbelievers among them, *but not really of them.* The apostolic epistles were addressed to the churches

as such, yet describe true Christians exclusively by the terms made use of, ignoring unbelievers as members of the church at all.

Such, then, is the principle of membership in a Christian church. Regenerate persons are its only true, constituent members.

This principle is indeed one of difficult application in many cases of practice; and a perfect application of it, in any case, is impossible for man, who can not see as God seeth. Yet the difficulty of its application does not militate against the truth of the principle. And it is by a firm faith in principles, and by keeping them always in view, that we can come the nearest to perfection in the application of them.

But the principle is by no means utterly impracticable of application. "Every tree is known by its fruits;" and the saving work of the Spirit is known by its fruit (Gal. v. 22 sq.). Every genuine work of grace will make itself manifest in the outward life, sooner or later; sufficiently so for all practical purposes in church life and relations. Absolute assurance of our good estate is not given us; in our imperfect, imma-

ture state, it would not be good for us: and the full assurance of hope, which is attained by some in this life, is the ripe fruit, usually, of enlarged spiritual attainments and experience in the religious life. “If any man [or any church] lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” The wisdom from above is profitable, and is sufficient to direct in the matter now under consideration.

But the question is raised, What shall we do with unbelievers who may have obtained admittance into the Christian church? The plain answer is, If by their fruits you know them, beyond reasonable doubt, to be persons yet in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity,—the appointed process of Christian Church discipline is kindly and faithfully to be applied, in order that the case may be fully and publicly known, at least by all the church; and then the manifest unbeliever is to be disowned as a true follower of Christ, and excised from the fellowship of the church. Or, if the case be a doubtful one, let it alone to the ordeal of God and

divine truth in this world ; at all events, to the judgment of the great day. While the tares and the wheat grow together, we can hardly distinguish them in the blade, they appear so much alike. Let both grow together until harvest, lest ye tear up some of the wheat along with the tares (Matt. xiii. 30). Yet this direction of the Master by no means allows his disciples knowingly to sow tares among the wheat, or to let them remain in the church when their true character becomes notoriously manifest. “An enemy sowed the tares while men slept.”

Here again, in opposition to our principle of church membership, an appeal is made to the example of the Jewish church, ordained and ordered as it was by God himself, and in which there was no visible line drawn between the godly and the ungodly in its organization and religious privileges.

This is admitted. Nevertheless, while the true church of God was apparently merged in the nation of Israel, the true Israel was, at the same time, really distinct from the nation. The truly pious

were even then regarded as the true church of God. This the prophets often told their rebellious and wicked countrymen. This Christ plainly intimates (John viii. 39). And this Paul explicitly teaches. "For they are not all Israel that are of Israel" (Rom. ii. 29, and ix. 6).

But that economy was altogether typical and preparatory for the more perfect dispensation of the gospel; which is emphatically "the dispensation of the Spirit," as that was "of the law." The Jewish church, therefore, is not to be taken as a model for the Christian church. The New Testament everywhere puts Christianity in *contrast*, not in *parallelism*, with Judaism. So that we may lay it down as an axiom, that whatever was peculiar to Judaism as such is unsuitable for Christianity; that is to say, unsuitable for its outward forms and organization. *The spiritual import* of both is the same. The invisible church of the living God has existed under both, and been cherished by both. But the outward and the formal have been entirely changed and greatly simplified in Christianity.

This Judaizing error of confounding the church with the world, or mixing it up with the civil state, and admitting men with little or no evidence of true spiritual piety into the formal fellowship of the church, has been the occasion of incalculable mischief to the religion and church of Christ. Thereby unconverted men have been lulled into a deeper fatal security in their sins and self-righteousness. And, instead of the church Christianizing the world by such an amalgamation, the effect has always been, that the world has secularized the church, obscured its true glory, and shorn it of its renovating power in the world.

Whereas, wherever the true principle of church membership has been firmly held, and acted on with Christian wisdom and prudence, the unconverted have occupied their true position, — out of the fold, as they are out of Christ, — and thereby have been constantly reminded of their lost and dangerous condition. The communion of the church, too, has been more pure, her life more instinct with love to God and man, and her power for good in the world the more powerful.



The special duties of church-members are simply the duties of our holy religion within the sphere of their covenant relation to God and each other. These duties are all fulfilled in one word, *Love*,—love to the Redeemer and his cause, delight in his service, and love to each other as God's children,—brethren and sisters in the Lord,—and love for perishing souls, for whom Christ died, all over the world. They are such as these: stated attendance on the public worship of the church and preaching of the gospel, especially on the communion services of the Lord's supper; statedly and occasionally praying with and for each other, for their children, the children of the covenant, for their pastor and teacher, and for the prosperity of the work of the Lord among them; aiding in every way they can, "as of the ability that God giveth," to sustain and promote the interests of true religion and morality in the church and throughout the world; *studying the things that make for peace*, "in lowliness of mind each esteeming another better than himself, in honor preferring one another; and in all brotherly

kindness and charity watching over each other, for every one's spiritual good and growth in grace.

When any member of a particular local church removes his residence beyond its bounds, so that he can no longer enjoy the privileges or discharge the duties of a member in it, his formal relations should then be transferred to some other church of Christ. The relation of church membership is really a spiritual, living, and active relation; and it really ceases, even in form, — all but in name, — when practically its duties and privileges cease. It is then a thing that was, but is not, and ought to be resumed somewhere, if in the providence of God that can be done. If that can not be done, the case is an exceptional one. But if that can be done, and the non-resident member (so called) neglects to have it done, why should not the church — the other party to the covenant, binding on both the delinquent member and the church — take measures to have it done? And if the non-resident refuses to acquiesce in this course, why should not his name be erased from the records, as a covenant-breaker or delinquent?



For like obvious reasons, no member of a Christian church can be consistently and regularly dismissed from it, not to unite with any other church, but to live in open fellowship with the unbelieving world. — 1 John ii. 19.

## CHAPTER III.

THE OFFICIAL MINISTRY OF THE CHRISTIAN  
CHURCH.

PROPOSITION. — *The official ministers of the Christian Church are simply Christian men, qualified by gifts of nature and of divine grace — and thereby called of God to give themselves wholly “to public prayers and the ministry of the word,” to the pastoral care of churches, and the conversion of sinners.*

THEY are simply Christian men, — not a superior order of men in the church, analogous to the patrician ranks of civil society in some countries, — but simply men of superior endowments, gifts of divine providence and of the Holy Spirit, qualifying them eminently for the duties specified.

It is true, all in the church have their several talents given them, differing in kind and in number, for usefulness in the church. “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal,” — for some profit to the church,

in the service of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 7). But generally, if not invariably, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are superinduced upon the gifts of nature and the acquisitions of human culture and learning, which thereby are enhanced in value and power for usefulness in the service of Christ. This was strikingly exemplified among the apostles and ancient prophets themselves. And hence, even as every Christian is called of God and bound by solemn vows to use his abilities in the service of Christ, — and that in whatever sphere of usefulness for which they specially qualify him, whether within or without the church, — so those whom God by his gifts has specially qualified for the Christian ministry are thereby chosen and called of God to serve him in the ministry of the gospel. Special gifts and opportunities constitute a special call to use them according to the will and intent of the divine Donor. And, unless the Spirit be quenched by reluctance, there will usually be felt also a gracious inclination of the heart, a constraining love for the work of the ministry (Gal. i. 16; 1 Cor. ix. 16). Such a call of God is something more

than simply the choice of a profession for personal ease or worldly advantage.

Thus it was, the apostles and primitive preachers of the gospel were called and qualified by the Head of the church for their work. Some were called to be *apostles*. But they were also specially qualified by him for the office, having been instructed and trained by himself personally for nearly three years, and then specially endowed with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, as on the day of Pentecost and afterwards. Some apostles and others were specially endowed with the gift of inspiration, orally to reveal the mind and will of the Lord, in that age when as yet the inspired volume was not completed; and thereby they were called to be *prophets* in the Christian church. Some, whose talents and gifts specially qualified them to be evangelists, were thereby called of God, and sent forth by the churches to evangelize the nations, as missionaries now do. And some again, whose gifts and graces, enlarged knowledge and Christian experience, fitted them to be masters and leaders in Israel, were thereby called of God and formally set apart, to be pastors and

teachers of the people of God over established churches. So the miraculous gifts of that age fitted some for other special departments of usefulness, as the gifts of healing, discerning of spirits, &c.; which are now unknown in the church, not being needed to authenticate Christianity, already fully vouched for by its history and fruits in the world.

Thus we see, the official Christian ministry is an organic product of the spiritual life of the church, taking its special form and functions from the wants of the church and the world, and the gifts which God bestows to meet those wants. It is, at the same time, an important organ in the body, the church of Christ, by whose healthy function the life, vigor, and welfare of the whole body, and each of its members, are promoted. Such were the views of the Apostle Paul respecting ecclesiastical offices (see Rom. xii. 4-8; 1 Cor. xii. 4-12, 27, 28; Eph. iv. 7-16).

The chief function of a minister of Christ is to dispense the word of life,—"to preach the word" (2 Tim. iv. 2). Christian ministers, therefore, are not priests, in any other sense than

that in which all Christians are such ; namely, metaphorically, to offer spiritual sacrifices unto God (1 Peter ii. 5, 9 ; Rom. xii. 1). Jesus Christ is the only priest known in Christianity (Heb. iii. 1). Nor is the Christian ministry a prelatie hierarchy, set over the church “ to lord it over God’s heritage.” Christ himself is the only King and Lawgiver in Zion (Ps. ii. 6). His ministers are simply his ambassadors, “ beseeching men, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God ” (2 Cor. v. 20).

The pastor of a particular church is but a brother in the brotherhood. If not already a private member of it, he becomes, by the election of the people and his induction into office, an *ex-officio* member of the church of which he is pastor.\* A brother he is, however, set over them in the Lord, to watch for their souls as one that must give account, and to labor in the vine-

\* His private membership, wherever it may be, practically ceases, or is held in abeyance for the time being, so far forth as the duties of pastor and those of a private member do not coincide. The pastor is practically, i.e. *actually*, one of the church, yet distinguishable from it by being *set over it* in the Lord (compare Heb. xiii. 17).

yard more abundantly than they all. As their pastor and teacher, he is to feed them with knowledge of Christian doctrine and duty ; usually to be their leader in the devotions of the sanctuary ; and generally to oversee their religious concerns, and do all he can, according to his best judgment and ability, to promote their highest interests for time and for eternity. All this pre-eminence among them, however, exists only for his work's sake. His only rights and prerogatives as their minister grow out of the duties of his office, as all human rights grow out of human duties ; and they all may be summed up in this : the right to whatever is conducive to a full and efficient discharge of his official work among them.

The work of a Christian minister is unlike every other vocation of man on earth. It is spiritual. It demands the whole soul and life of a minister, unentangled with the secular affairs of this world, in order to a full, faithful, and efficient performance of it. His ordination vows bind the minister of Christ "to give himself wholly to the work." Hence, he must forego all worldly occupations and means of earning a tem-



poral maintenance for himself and his family. These occupations, except in some exceptional cases, should be laid aside, as incompatible with his great work. And, that he may be able to do so, he has a divinely-given right to his temporal maintenance. "For even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 14).

So also he who is qualified and called of God to do the work of an evangelist, is still simply a brother in the great brotherhood of Christians, and officially on the same level with other ministers of Christ. He is commissioned by God, and sent forth to labor especially for the extension of Christ's kingdom on earth. And, though he labors not with or for any one local church exclusively, but is a minister, so to speak, of the church universal on earth, yet, for that very reason, his right also to whatever is needful for a full and efficient discharge of his work as an evangelist remains equal to that of any pastor. His claim upon the churches of Christ for his temporal maintenance, and an interest in the sympathies, prayers, and co-operation of the



churches, is as good and strong a claim as that of any pastor on his own people. If there be any difference in degree, the missionary seems to have the stronger claim; for he has given himself to a larger, more arduous, and more self-denying work, remote from the sympathies of home.

Thus, we see, a true minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is one whom God has qualified for the work, and thereby called into it. God hath made him a minister. His credentials are from heaven,—credentials seen and read by all men competent to read and understand them; credentials seen in his ministerial gifts and labors and holy life in the ministry. His authority to preach the word, and administer the ordinances of the gospel, he receives from the hand of God, and not from any man, or company, or succession of men, even as Paul received his valid ministry (Gal. i. 1).

What then? Do we thus make nothing of a formal ordination to the Christian ministry,—nothing of “the laying-on of the hands of the presbytery” or prelate, or the authority of

church officials to confer upon others the same ministerial office which they had obtained in the same way ?

By no means. We rather establish the law of ecclesiastical ordination on its true foundation, and determine its true import. From the fundamental position we occupy on the subject of Christian Church Polity, the formal ordination of any one to the Christian ministry must be founded on the previous and higher ordination of God, through the gifts of his grace and Holy Spirit. A Christian minister is made, as a Christian man is made, by the spiritual gifts and graces, bestowed by the Holy Ghost, which fit him for the work of the ministry. Without these, no man can be a true and faithful workman in the vineyard of the Lord. And the highest interests of true religion and the church require that the churches should recognize and receive as ministers of Christ none but those who furnish good and sufficient evidence of their spiritual qualifications, and their call of God to the sacred office.

The sole intent, therefore, of the ordination

service, and its true practical validity, is to guard against the intrusion of unsuitable persons into the ministry, and to enable the churches to know, after due examination and trial made by competent persons in their behalf, whom they may receive and confide in as true, able, and faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is enjoined by every dictate of Christian wisdom and prudence, as well as by scriptural example, that some formal ordination to the ministry, after due and careful examination of the candidate, should be one of the permanent regulations of the Christian church. The primitive practice of formal ordination was evidently founded on this ground of expediency, demanded by wisdom and prudence, for the welfare of the church. Compare and consider the qualifications required (1 Tim. iii. 1-7, and v. 21, 22; 2 Tim. ii. 2, 14, 15, and iv. 1-5; Titus i. 5-16; 1 Peter v. 1-4; 2 Peter ii. 1-3).

The preliminary requisite examination is the most important part of the whole service. It should be fully and faithfully done, and should

embrace the candidate's personal piety and standing in some church ; his acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, even in the original tongues ; his knowledge in theology ; his qualifications for the pastoral office ; and his " aptness to teach." A wide curriculum and a high standard of ministerial qualifications should be held up in these examinations, both for the sake of the general interests of the church, and that well-qualified candidates may be at once known among the churches, and duly appreciated.

The true import of the ordination service is apparent from the view of its intent already taken. It is a public, formal induction into the ministerial office, of one who appears to have been already called and ordained of God for the work of the ministry ; and it is thereby a public recognition of the person ordained as a true minister of Christ Jesus. The divine and spiritual ordination must precede the ecclesiastical and formal ordination, or the latter is unreal and nugatory.

The ordaining prayer, so called, is simply a

solemn, special prayer suited to the occasion, in which the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of the great Head of the church are implored to rest on the brother on whose head their hands are laid. And this laying-on of the hands of the presbytery is simply an ancient and suitable action accompanying any special prayer for an individual present. It was in ancient times used on many other special occasions besides ordinations to the sacred office (Gen. xlviii. 14; Num. xxvii. 18-23; Matt. xix. 15; Luke iv. 40; Acts xiii. 3, xix. 6, xxviii. 8; 1 Tim. iv. 14; Heb. vi. 2). But that the laying-on of hands by the presbytery (the elders of the churches) or a prelate really and actually confers authority to preach the gospel, is a notion for which there is no foundation in the Scriptures, or in Christianity as a pure spiritual system of religion. As a formality, however, it is solemn and significant, and should always be observed at ordinations. Christianity by no means discards formalities, but only repudiates them as essentials in its spiritual religion.

The other usual and appropriate parts of the ordination service are a sermon preceding, and a charge to the minister, with an address to the people, following the prayer of ordination.

There is a distinction, worthy of notice here, between ordination to the Christian ministry, and installation into the pastoral office. By the former, the ordained person becomes a recognized minister of Jesus Christ for the church at large on earth: by the latter, he becomes the recognized pastor of a particular church. In the ordination, the divine call is the essential prerequisite: in the latter, it is the free choice of the people, calling him to be their pastor.

But here another inquiry, still more worthy of attention, presents itself. In whom is vested the authority of formal ordination in the Christian church?

The parties concerned in an ordination, or, as jurists would say, the parties in interest, are these three: first, the candidate himself, who is assumed to have already become satisfied of his calling of God to the sacred office; next, the particular church who wish him to be set over



them in the Lord, who already have had trial of the candidate's ability and suitableness to be their pastor and teacher; third, the church of Christ at large have an interest in the ordination of every one who is called of God to labor in the wide field wherever Providence may cast his lot, whether as pastor or evangelist. Particularly those local churches in the vicinity, who habitually hold fellowship with each other in Christian doctrine and church life, have the deepest and an immediate interest in the ordination of one who is to labor in their vicinity, and affect the cause of Christ among them for good or for ill. By the law of Christian courtesy and fellowship among churches, they will be bound to receive and regard the ordained man as a minister of Christ on various occasions often occurring. These churches, therefore, as a part of the church at large, have the strongest right to have a voice and a part in the ordination of one coming among them. As a representative part of the church of Christ at large, and as themselves affected by it, they have obviously an *inherent right* to act on the question of ordination.

They have a duty in the premises incumbent on them, and therefore a right belonging to them, and inherent in the duty. The churches are expressly enjoined to try those who come to them as ministers of Christ, and professedly imbued with his Spirit, "whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John iv. 1; comp. 2 John 10, 11). And what more fitting time for this duty than the occasion of an ordination?

In the case of ordination to the work of an evangelist or missionary, the reasons prevail with peculiar force. The evangelist has no pastoral relation to any particular local church, but is a minister of Christ in the church at large on earth. His only special relation is to the church of which he is a member, and to the churches of the vicinity from which he goes forth, and which are specially called on for their sympathies, prayers, and contributions in his behalf, while doing the work of an evangelist.

The office of the deaconship in the Christian church was appointed to relieve the ministers of the Word from such temporal affairs and



duties relating to the work of the church as would hinder them from "giving themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts vi. 1, 6 ; Philip. i. 1). The duties of the deaconship comprehend all such affairs as need to be done, aside from those of the pastor and teacher, in the work of the church, for which, usually, better qualifications may be found among the private members of the churches than in the ministry. The needful qualifications for this office seem to be gravity of character, prudence and discreetness in speech and action, industry and tact in the management of business matters, along with a mature piety and undoubted devotedness to the interests of the church and cause of Christ (1 Tim. iii. 8-13).

Preaching the word, of course, is no part of the official work of the deaconship, as originally intended and instituted ; for, if it were, they also would need other deacons to relieve them from secular cares, that they might give themselves continually to the ministry of the Word. And why should not these sub-deacons also preach, and have still others under them ? Thus

the deaconship is not, properly speaking, an order of the Christian ministry, which is to labor in word and doctrine, but only, and subordinately, an office instituted as “a help” to the ministry of the Word. Nevertheless, deacons being chosen as men of deep piety and enlarged experience, and of eminent executive abilities in practical matters, very appropriately and usefully may be and should be laboring brethren in all meetings of the church for devotional as well as other business, — especially when there is no pastor and teacher present. But this gives them no pre-eminence in rank or prerogatives over the brethren; nor does it shut out any one from using his gift in exhortation, in prayer, and singing praise (Heb. iii. 13, and x. 25; Colos. iii. 16: compare 1 Cor. xiv.).

From the foregoing discussion on the ministry of the church, it is seen that there is really but one order of Christian ministers of the gospel, — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. iv. 11). The distinctions indicated in this enumeration indicate a diversity of gifts, and a distribution of work corresponding to

the gifts, rather than grades of rank, high and low. When the apostles and prophets spake by inspiration of God in the primitive churches, their word was indeed clothed with divine authority, as the inspired volume now is among us. The authority and the deference paid to it belonged not to them, but to the Lord who spake by them. And, though dead and gone to heaven, they yet speak to the churches in the inspired written word. But the same divine authority belongs to every word of God uttered by evangelists and pastors taken from the written word. There seems, then, to be no ground for any disparity of rank in the true ministry of the Christian church. They are all brethren in the Lord, and servants [ministers] of Christ, engaged in his service. However diverse their ministerial gifts, and the sphere of their labors severally, they are all on a par as ministers of Christ. None of them may "lord it" over one another, any more than over the flock. There is no official prelacy in the Christian ministry. The apostles claimed none (1 Peter v. 1-4).

One or two other points of inquiry may be here appended at the close of this chapter.

It may have occurred already to some minds, and have operated as an objection to the position taken,—namely, that not the formal ordination of the presbytery, or eldership, but the previous ordination and call of God, really makes one a minister of Christ,—if this be so, then the person is really a minister of Christ already, and should be so regarded and treated by the churches.

In reply, we hesitate not to say, that, from that time forth when God called him by his grace, he is a minister elect, chosen of God, and called to prepare for his work, and then enter upon it. But the inward divine call is not given, at least in these days, by an inspired revelation, but is inferred from the gracious and providential dealings of God with the person. He and others can learn the call of God only from the work of the Holy Spirit and the needful gifts of divine grace. These, however, are never given in full measure at once, but are to be acquired gradually in the use of means. Good and hopeful signs of his call to the ministry may be seen in the growing warmth and

stability of his personal piety; from his prevailing love for the souls of his fellow-men, and labors for their good according to his ability and opportunities; from the development of his natural endowments, intellectual, moral, and physical, for the work before him; and from the facility with which he makes progress in human learning and culture, while a student preparing for the ministry. Thus, so far and so fast as these evidences of the divine call become developed, both he, and the churches acquainted with him, can see that he is a minister elect of God, and is, or should be, in a course of preparation for the ministry; as were the original apostles while they were under the tuition and training of Christ for their work, and Paul also, after his conversion, while he sojourned in Arabia, as there is some good reason to believe. (Compare Gal. i. 12, with vs. 15-19.) Education for the Christian ministry seems to be an institution of Christianity.

How, then, should the students for the ministry, apparently and hopefully called of God, be regarded and treated in the churches of Christ?

In reply, we hesitate not to say, they should be regarded and treated as ministers of Christ, though yet in their youthful immaturity. As such, the interest and prayers of the churches should center upon them, and all needful aid and encouragement be given them in their preparatory course. Their temporal maintenance even, so far as needful, should be provided for by the churches directly or through some convenient intermediate agency; and this according to the spirit and intent of the rule ordained by the great Head of the church, "They who preach the gospel should live of the gospel." The preparatory course is for them an indispensable part of the work of the ministry, just as an ordained minister's private studies from week to week is a part of his work. And the reason for the rule is as applicable to the case of the candidate giving himself up to preparation for the ministry, as to the minister formally ordained and fully in it. Why, then, should it not be applied, so far as is needful, under the guidance of wisdom and prudence?

On this ground we place the claims of educa-



tion for the ministry, not as almsgiving bestowed on the poor and needy, but as a debt and duty made incumbent on the churches and disciples of Christ.

Another point of inquiry, What is the *status* in the Christian church of an ordained minister who lays aside the work of the ministry altogether and permanently? In reply, we hesitate not to say, He ceases to be a minister altogether, and his *status* is only that of a Christian man. But the work appropriate for a Christian minister is not to be limited to formal preaching and pastoral care. The field for ministerial usefulness extends to whatever has a bearing on the cause and kingdom of Christ. In all such departments of usefulness, to which he may be providentially called, the minister is one serving the Master.

But if, for any other cause, one lays aside the work of the ministry altogether and permanently, he ceases to be one actually, and his *status* is only that of a Christian man. Formal ecclesiastical ordination confers no permanent

*status*, no indelible official character, aside from the work. It is the divine call, *and obedience to it*, that makes one really a minister of Christ, and entitles him to the *status* and prerogatives belonging to it.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE UNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

PROPOSITION. — *The True Unity of the Christian Church is Spiritual.*

THE fundamental idea or principle in every system is also the unifying principle in it. This is seen in the solar system, in all living organic beings, and in the civil state.

This must be so also in the church of the living God ; which, as already shown, is a living product of spiritual life in the regenerate children of God. This life, by operating in the social nature of man, makes of the many a one, living, organic whole, the church universal and invisible on earth. And every particular local church must have its true unity in the same principle of spiritual life to which it owes its very existence as a true church of Christ.

This hidden life of the church, of course, in its social relations and workings, must manifest itself outwardly through some external forms of Christian brotherhood, faith, and worship. By these forms the church is made visible in the world. And, at first sight, it may seem to some that this oneness in principle must produce an outward uniformity in the polity, creed, and forms of worship in the Christian church. And so indeed, by its own normal working, it has that tendency. But, on mature consideration, it will be seen, that the true unity of the church is to be sought for, not so much in outward forms and expressions, as in the fruits of the inner spiritual life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. v. 22). "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph iv. 4-6). "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or*

free ; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit ” (1 Cor. xii. 13). Said Christ, “ The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father *in spirit and in truth* ; for the Father seeketh such to worship him ” (John iv. 23). From these quotations, bearing expressly on the point now before us, and from the fundamental idea of the church as a product of divine grace, it is manifest that the true essential unity of the church is spiritual.

It follows, that, within the limits of vital godliness, this unity may be consistent with some diversity of outward forms of church polity, faith, and worship, — provided the true life and light of the church operates in, and shines through, those forms. Whether all forms are alike congenial with the spiritual nature of Christianity, or alike promotive of the true welfare of the church, is not the point now before us. Of that, more hereafter.

But, just as man can live in all climes and regions of the earth, under all conditions and forms of civil government and social life, and under all varieties of civilization, — albeit all

these circumstantials are by no means alike conducive to human welfare, — and yet remain man, and exhibit genuine human life, which is essentially one the world over; even so the inner life and spiritual energy of the church of Christ are such, and so independent of external forms and circumstances, that the church can exist and live and act, and bring forth many of its beneficent fruits in some degree of perfection, under many varieties of forms, and modes of culture.

On what other ground can we account for the changes which the church of the living God has gone through, as to externals, in the generations past, — in the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, and, above all, at the coming of Christ and the establishment of Christianity — yet that church has ever been the same church, having ever the same spiritual life and unity?

These changes in external things took place by divine appointment, not arbitrarily, but for wise reasons, — reasons to be seen in the condition of the people of God themselves at different times; seen in the relation of the church

to the world, then full of idolatry all around the church and in deadly hostility to it; seen in the plan of redemption, and its progressive development before the coming of Christ; and, above all, seen at the establishment of Christianity, in order to be the form of the church and of religion adapted for all nations and all coming time, and destined to be, *par excellence*, the ministration of the Spirit, in distinction from that of Moses, which abounded so much in forms.

Why, then, may it not still be, that the true unity of the church on earth may remain intact, while some diversity in the outward and the formal may characterize the particular churches, and denominations of churches, of which the church of Christ on earth is composed, — *provided*, that the outward forms do not belie the Spirit, or crush out the life and light of the true church; that is, *provided* that true vital godliness be the inner life of the church, and manifest itself through these diversities of forms.

Here we see the allowable grounds and the

necessary limitations of denominational divisions and diversities in external things among true Christian churches. The things in which they may differ relate either to speculative views of divine truth as apprehended by the human understanding, or to the outward ordering of the church and its polity, or to some form of ritual observance. The true life and unity of a Christian church, which is spiritual, do not lie in these things, however true or useful they may be in their place. Sectarian divisions in the one true church of Christ do not arise from the nature of true religion, but from the limitations of the human understanding, striving to grasp spiritual truth within its narrow intellectual forms of conception; and from the diverse influences of education; and, withal, from the immaturity of the Christian attainments and graces of the church in this world. And sectarianism would undoubtedly be less prominent and less extensive among the churches of Christ, and fewer evils would attend it, if they would look more at the things which are spiritual, and less at things formal, — more at the things in which

they agree, and less at those in which they differ; putting the latter, in the scale of importance, far below the former, and letting true Christian charity (1 Cor. xiii.) supplant the sectarian party spirit of the world, as it should, in the church of Christ.

But denominational divisions of churches are by no means an unmitigated evil. Through them, more peace and harmony are enjoyed in churches than otherwise there would be. And while men are imperfect, and at best but babes in Christ Jesus when they are born into the kingdom, it will be wise and prudent, and therefore desirable, to have a denominational classification of the churches of Christ. At all events, it is not by direct efforts to demolish denominational divisions, it is not by the sectarian spirit, that sectarianism can ever be rooted out of the church on earth; but by cherishing more sedulously the spiritual life and brotherly love of the churches, and by the churches uniting more in the common enterprises of spreading our holy religion over all the earth.

Meantime, however, no church, or denomina-



tion of churches, can be rightfully regarded and held in fellowship as a true church, or Christian denomination, unless we have good and sufficient evidence of vital godliness being prevalent among them as their chief characteristic. Among these evidences is their creed, and their faith in it, containing, at least, the fundamental and saving doctrines of the gospel. Christian churches are to be tested as Christian men are tested, by their professions, by their love for the truth as it is in Jesus, and by their fruits of holy and exemplary living.

This doctrine of the spiritual unity of the Christian church has, on its practical side, the doctrine and duty of Christian fellowship among the particular churches and sects of the Christian church on earth. The bond which unites all true believers to Christ the Head, and to each other as the members of his body, which is the church, — the very same bond which combines and unifies those individuals who are members of any particular church, — should also unite the various tribes of Israel in some visible fellowship of churches, and in co-operation in all

good works, for the glory of their common Lord, and the advancement of his kingdom among men. The ways and means of doing this may well be left to the promptings of Christian wisdom and prudence, imbued with true Christian charity (1 Cor. xv.).

This fellowship of churches with churches, however, and Christian fellowship in general, by no means implies that the parties to it ignore, or connive at, or tacitly approve, whatever is deemed to be erroneous or wrong or defective in each other. It simply implies, that, notwithstanding defects and errors which exist in all Christians on earth, they regard each other as brethren in the Lord, and true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that they will regard each other in love, as brethren of one family, and co-operate so far as they can wisely and usefully in the common cause of Christ and his church.

The occasions and the business<sup>1</sup> appropriate for this fellowship between churches will obviously be such as relate to the common interests and affairs of the particular churches, and the king-

dom of Christ upon earth. In the management of their own internal affairs, particular churches should be left to themselves, as most competent to manage them wisely, unless in cases where the aid and counsel of other churches may be needed and requested. No church, or churches combined, can rightfully exercise legislative or magisterial authority to command other churches; but may only by means of divine truth, in brotherly love, and in both the spirit and way of brotherhood, give the desired counsel and aid. The whole church on earth is but a brotherhood, and every particular church but a brotherhood within itself. And Christ alone, the great and only Head of the church, has the authority to legislate, and to issue imperative commands, in the church on earth, and in each particular church. Every thing, therefore, should be done in each church, and among the churches, in a fraternal spirit and way, consonant with the spiritual freedom and the love which the Spirit of God imparts.

Finally, it is also evident from the foregoing, that no local particular church can rightfully

claim an inherent and absolute independence of all other churches. A particular church, indeed, may, from the force of circumstances, be compelled to live alone, and act by itself independently of other churches of Christ. And, for the particular purposes for which a local church is isolated from other churches, it should be independent. Yet even in regard to these, every brotherhood in the great brotherhood of churches should be willing to receive fraternal advice from other churches, and even allow fraternal inquiries to be made respecting their affairs and welfare, — just as all Christians should in regard to each other. Let this be done in the spirit of brotherly kindness and charity, and received in the like spirit, and no harm, but much good, may come of it. But to set up a claim “to review and control” each other’s affairs on the one hand, or to set up the claim of absolute independence on the other hand, is alike alien from the spirit of Christ, and from the duties that grow out of the true unity of the church, which is spiritual. It may amount to the sin of schism in the body of Christ.

Besides what has already been incidentally said connected with the topic of this chapter (p. 53), some further considerations connected with it will occur hereafter (p. 96).

## CHAPTER V.

## THE OUTWARD FORMS OF THE CHURCH.

PROPOSITION.—*Christianity naturally assumes for itself such outward forms as are most appropriate to its spiritual nature, its characteristic simplicity, and its great mission in this world.*

SOME outward forms of church life and action are, of course, indispensable for a religion which, although essentially spiritual, is adapted to the social condition of mankind, and whose great mission it is to be “the light of the world, the salt of the earth.”

But that which is outward and formal in such a religion must ever be subordinate to its spiritual nature; and should ever be kept subservient to the interests and efficiency of true religion among men. Through all forms the true light should be seen, the saving and salutary power of the gospel should be felt. For this end, the out-

ward forms and modes of church life must also have an adaptation to the existing circumstances of men and times.

This was strikingly so under the Mosaic dispensation, which abounded so much in outward forms and ceremonies. In its day, and for its special purpose, Judaism was the best form of the church and of religious services, best adapted to the Oriental mind, the circumstances of the church of God, then planted, like the burning bush which Moses saw, in the midst of an idolatrous hostile world. Its punctilious ritual had a significancy typical of the way of life and salvation through the Christian atonement and the sanctifying grace of God. Prophetically it was the shadow of good things to come. It was, in its day, the appointed means of grace for the people of God; and it was an awe-inspiring ministration of the law to the sinner's conscience.

But, when Christ came, the types of Judaism were superseded by the Christian antitypes; the prophetic shadows fled away at the brightness of his rising; and the multifarious punctilious ritual of the Mosaic church gave place to the simplicity and plainness of the gospel.



Here arises the question, Whether we have, under the gospel, any ritual code of laws prescribed for the Christian church, in strict accordance with which the churches of Christ must now be organized, and the services of religion be regulated and scrupulously observed.

No intelligent, candid person will aver that we have any such code on the sacred record. But, had such a ritual been needful or desirable for the Christian church, such an omission to prescribe and record it in the New Testament would be utterly unaccountable: a record of it could not have been overlooked by the divine apostolic wisdom which presided over the rising church. This omission is peculiarly significant in regard to the primitive Christian churches. They were composed, at first, of converts from Judaism, who had been accustomed to a ritual punctiliously prescribed and observed. Their hallowed associations clustered around the religious forms which they and their fathers had observed, and which, it is well known, they held tenaciously, and were strongly disposed to bring with them into Christianity. Hence they, above

all men, must have craved a Christian ceremonial law; and hence, if one had been desirable for the interests of the Christian religion and church, undoubtedly such a law, for forms and ceremonies, would have been given to the churches of the apostolic age. But no Christian ritual code is found in the sacred record, and therefore we conclude was not, and is not, desirable for the Christian church.

But here another question rises, namely, Whether the forms and usages of the primitive churches were not intended to be models for the churches in all subsequent time. But, if that were so, it is unaccountable that we should have no hint in the New Testament of that important fact. Besides, we have no full and authentic record of the forms and usages in those churches, only incidental and fragmentary statements, of great historical value indeed, but far short of a complete account of them. We find no canon law or rubric among the primitive churches; and there is no evidence that they ever had one. The alleged model, therefore, is lost. A careful and candid study of the few fragmentary notices

we have of the primitive church polity and religious usages will rather lead us to see that the spiritual element of our holy religion, and not any ritual code, or model church, or apostolic prescription, controlled and regulated the outward forms. For example, when disorders crept into any of the churches, the apostles said not, they are uncanonical, but they simply appealed to the sense of Christian propriety or principle against them: the prescribed rubric was simply this, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. xiv. 40).

And when we consider that Christianity was intended for all nations to the end of time, for mankind in all stages of civilization and mental and moral culture, and under all forms of civil government and social life, we see that Christianity, by this very freedom from rigid and permanent forms of church order and services, is fitted to be the religion of all climes and of all time. In this respect it is entirely different from Judaism, which could never have been the religion of the whole world. It is therefore unphilosophical as well as unscriptural, and contrary to the spirit

and interest of Christianity, to go to the Jewish economy for a church organization, a priestly hierarchy, and a showy ritual, for the Christian church.

To account for the actual forms and usages of primitive times, so far as we know what they were, it is deemed altogether more in accordance with the general teaching of the New-Testament Scriptures respecting formalities and "bodily exercise" in religion, more in harmony with the pure, free spirit of Christianity, and more consistent with the historical facts in the case, — these being interpreted rightly, as they should be, by that teaching and by that spirit, — to say that the primitive disciples and churches, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost in the apostles, yet not by any special revelations, simply fell into or spontaneously adopted the religious forms and usages to which they had been accustomed; taking so much of them as was consistent with the spirit and facts of the gospel dispensation, and rejecting whatever was peculiar to the old, and unsuitable for the new economy of divine grace. This consideration explains why the

usages of the Jewish synagogue were taken, and not those of the temple worship and priesthood. They better suited the genius and purposes of Christianity. So also Christ took the commemorative ordinance of the Lord's Supper from the Jewish Passover, and the ordinance of Christian baptism from the diverse baptisms of the Old Testament, enjoining them upon his disciples among all nations to the end of time; yet prescribing neither of these punctiliously, as to the forms and modes of observance. Their spiritual import regulates the form, rather than the form the spiritual import. And the same predominance of the spiritual over the formal is to be seen throughout the whole history of Christianity in its first and purest ages.

In process of time, as the spirituality and simplicity of primitive times degenerated, the forms of church polity and religious services underwent a corresponding change from the simple to the showy; and this served to promote and perpetuate the spiritual degeneracy. These became more and more conformed to this world. The polity of the primitive churches was gradu-

ally changed into those of civil government,— the monarchies, oligarchies, hierarchies of the world ; a more imposing formalism in religious worship was adopted, which served to Judaize, and even paganize to a great extent, the services of the Christian sanctuary. Thus arose the papacy.

Yet the true church of the living God still survived in the midst of a corrupt and degenerate Christendom. It verified the ancient symbol of the bush burning but not consumed,— the hidden seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Rom. xi. 4). The true members of the church struggled against these corruptions, and in the most degenerate times shed some light amid the darkness of the world. The true church has ever had her “two witnesses,” faithful and true to the truth ; her “reformers before the Reformation,” raising their voice against the formalism of the visible church. And the reformation in the sixteenth century exhibits the hidden life and power of the true church, convulsively throwing off the incubus of carnal ordinances, and the domineering usurpations of the papacy. And that it has not done



this more perfectly is owing to no inherent weakness in spiritual religion, but to the shackles placed upon it through compromises with the policies and potentates of this world.

Here let it be noticed generally, that, in order to produce complete and perfect results in this world, the religion of Christ must be permitted to act freely, — “it must have free course, in order to be greatly glorified.” But there are always many and various hindrances to its free action and unfettered power for good, in churches no less than in the Christian. Perfect and complete results are not to be looked for in this world. Yet the Christian religion is, and ever has been, a power in the world, doing good under all disadvantages and circumstances. And while ever keeping her own holy and heavenly character untouched, Christianity may and will adopt, or yield to, such variations of unimportant outward forms, as may best promote her own beneficent ends. Like Paul, to a certain extent she can become all things to all men, if by any means she may save some.



## CHAPTER VI.

## CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

PROPOSITION. — *The fundamental principles of Church Polity, and the forms which most naturally result from the spiritual nature of the Christian religion and its normal working in the church, are the fraternal principle, and the Congregational form of church order and government.*

A CHURCH, like every other society of men, has need of some kind of government, as well for the sake of good order in its legitimate sacred functions, as on account of offenses, “that must needs come” among its members in their present imperfect state. The kind of government most desirable is obviously that which is most accordant with the true idea of the church, and the normal working of the religion of Christ among its members. If the constitution of the church, and the end for which it exists, are different

from those of other communities of men in this world, then the fundamental principle of church government must be different from that of other government, and its normal working different. The essential spiritual character of the religion and church of Christ determines the fundamental principle; and the form of government will be conformed to the principle, so far as the latter is developed in the church freely and fully.

Here, then, — leaving out of consideration all circumstances that hinder or modify the results of religious principle in church life, — our inquiry is, What is the true principle, and what the form of Church Polity, which naturally result from the spiritual nature, and the normal working of our holy religion in the church of God. These seem to be the fraternal principle of government, and the form of Congregationalism.

This principle results logically and really from the true idea of the church, which is that of a sacred brotherhood of the regenerate children of God; and from the fundamental law of

mutual love, which underlies the very life of the church, and which should pervade all its doings.

The fraternal principle of government is contradistinguished from the patriarchal or paternal, which has its proper place in the family or tribe. There the father or patriarch is the sole head and ruler. But, on this principle, God alone is the Head of his church, the sole Lawgiver in Zion. Hence, the papacy is an impious usurpation of the prerogatives of God. It is utterly anti-christian, and the farthest possible from the true idea and form of Church Polity. But all hierarchal church government, having in it something of the same wrong principle and spirit, is so far alien from true Christian church government; in which God alone in Christ is supreme, with no vicegerent or vicar on earth, or sacerdotal order "to lord it" over God's heritage. All legitimate church government is simply administration of God's word and gracious government in the church.

The fraternal principle is distinguished also from the magisterial principle of government,

which has its legitimate sphere and sway in the civil state. Civil government is ordained by God to be a terror to evil-doers; and for this purpose the civil magistrate beareth the sword not in vain, but is a minister of God to execute vengeance upon him that doeth evil (Rom. xiii. 1-4). To it, therefore, appropriately belong legislation, judicatories, and an executive, to enforce, by pains and penalties, law and justice upon the unjust and evil-doer. It is an administration simply of law and justice, and solely in regard to the worldly, temporal interests of human society.

But, on the contrary, divine grace is the distinctive and fundamental principle of government in the kingdom of Christ on earth. He governs his people through divine truth and love, and the Holy Spirit's gracious influences in their hearts. Pains and penalties have no place under his gracious sway: the sword and terror belong not to the government of the church. All judgment He hath reserved in his own hands, to be executed on his incorrigible enemies, in his own time and way, both in this

world and in the world to come. Afflictions sent upon his church are simply paternal chastisements. If, now, Christ himself rules on the principle of love in the church, and by means of truth and grace, the church itself and its office-bearers must rule on the same principle and by the same means. For they are but his ministers in the administration of church affairs.

In short, the fraternal principle of government is the only one that can be legitimate in a Christian church; which is a brotherhood of the regenerate children of God, and in which the fundamental law is the law of love. This is its fundamental constitutional law, underlying and pervading the whole religion and economy of the gospel; and it should pervade the whole organization and outward life and doings of every church. The fraternal principle of government is, in fact, simply the law of brotherly love carried out in the polity and government of the church.

In a Christian brotherhood, constituted by the regeneration of the Holy Ghost, there can be

no prelatial distinctions of birth: all are sons and daughters of the Most High God. The pre-eminence given to some by ministerial gifts and graces confers no authority "to lord it over God's heritage," — to rule over the church with an aristocratic, lordly authority; but only to rule as shepherds over the flock, — to watch for their souls, to feed them with knowledge of divine things, and to lead them by holy example in the ways of piety (Heb. xiii. 17; 1 Pet. v. 1-4; Acts xx. 28). These are the duties, and the only prerogatives, of the Christian ministry; and in reference to these, indeed, the churches are enjoined to obey their pastors, but forbidden to call any man master on earth; "For one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren" (Matt. xxiii. 8). Regal authority, in no shape or degree, can belong rightfully to Christian church government; nor even democratic authority, independent of Christ. Yet fraternal church government is by no means lawless and anarchical in its nature and tendency. For it is under law to Christ, the strongest of all law on the hearts and con-



sciences of Christians. It rather enjoins good order, and all proper subordination, on young and old, and all within the church (See 1 Pet. v. 5). And, so long as it is maintained in its own true spirit of love and fraternity, it can not fail to secure good order and harmony in the church; and whenever the true spirit of it is wanting, and the spirit of worldly pride, strife, and litigation, takes its place, the true remedy is, first of all, for the church to pray and labor for the restoration of the Holy Spirit's presence among them. Worldly remedies must fail in the church; which is to be ruled, as it is constituted, on a very different principle from that of civil government over an ungodly world. Magisterial authority, pains and penalties, are as much out of place in the church of Christ, as fraternal admonition would be in the state for a terror to evil-doers.

Such being the true constituent principle of government in the Christian church, the same must also be the formative principle of the true polity of the church, provided the vital principle



is allowed unimpeded to work out its own legitimate natural results. This entire freedom it may not have — never yet has had — in this world. All spiritual principles bring forth their fruit to perfection only in the church glorified. But still, the principles of the religion of Christ, in proportion to the freedom of their development and influence, do bring forth their own appropriate fruits. Thus the fraternal principle of church polity and government tends to produce a form of church polity conformed to its own spirit and influence. And this seems to us to be the Congregational form of Church Polity, as known in New England and elsewhere.

New England is here referred to, not as being the assumed standard of Congregationalism, or a perfect pattern of it in all respects; but as furnishing the largest and best example of it, on the whole, which modern history furnishes. Here it has existed from the earliest settlement of the country, comparatively unencumbered by other systems of Church Polity and worldly power, which, in other lands restrained and oppressed the Puritan churches of the fatherland; here

Congregationalism has grown up under most favorable circumstances for the free development of a Church Polity from religious life and principles.

The essential features of Congregationalism are the following : —

I. A Congregational church is a company of true believers in Christ, united by a public covenant with God and each other, and statedly meeting in one place, for the observance of public religious worship, and hearing the gospel preached, for promoting in every way the spiritual good of themselves and their children, and for seeking the salvation of their fellow-men through the gospel.

None but local churches are recognized in Congregationalism as truly and really churches. All God's people on earth and in heaven are, indeed, properly and scripturally called the church of God, in reference to their common relation to God and to each other as the redeemed of the Lord. But all national or denominational churches, so called, are repudiated by Congregationalism as really churches ; but are regarded

as only aggregates, or confederations of churches, such as the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the Methodist Episcopal Church, &c. That visible local churches alone are truly and really churches is manifest from the fundamental import of the term, which is that of an assembly, a *congregation* actually met; \* also from the duties of the church covenant and relation which imply personal intercourse among the members; and from the end in view, which is the promotion of personal piety by their mutual influence over each other. Such were the churches at Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and all others mentioned in the New Testament.

II. In each church the administration of affairs is vested in the brethren thereof.

They may see fit in some cases to delegate authority to a committee, or any one of their number, to act in their behalf; but in all cases the authority to act is that of the church.

This distinguishing feature of Congregationalism results from the idea of a church as a broth-

\* Hence, Congregationalism in distinction from any national churchism.

erhood of God's people, in covenant with God, under moral obligation only to Christ their head, owing allegiance to no other head or higher power. The right of self-government grows also out of the duties of the church covenant ; these are incumbent on the church as a church, and on its members as members ; and hence they have, individually and collectively, a right to self-government, — to the privilege of discharging their duties according to their own best judgment, and the clear dictates of their own consciences, under responsibility to God alone. This right belongs to the whole church. The office-bearers of a Congregational church are simply ministers, or servants of the church, — “ your servants for Jesus' sake.” The pastor even, has no power of government over the church, other than by moral influence. He “ rules ” over them “ by admonishing, counseling, reproof, rebuking, exhorting them, with all long-suffering and doctrine,” or instruction. In short, Congregational church government is spiritual, and is to be exercised with spiritual, not with carnal weapons, — namely with those of Christian truth

and brotherly love. None other so potent among true Christians.

III. Every Congregational church is competent within itself for the administration of its own internal affairs, independently of "the review and control" of other churches.

The fundamental reasons for this feature of the system have already been given under the preceding. None but the great Head of the church, the brotherhood, can have the right to rule imperatively in the church of God; and the church is solemnly bound thus to obey God alone, and no other. To obey man, or any body of men, instead of God, is a great mistake, if not a great sin, even when the obedience is right in other respects. On the church, too, rest the responsibilities and consequences of their own doings, in regard to their own internal affairs. Moreover, an enforced compliance with any rule or prescribed course of action, imposed upon them by any higher human power, contrary to their own views of right or expediency or conscience, would not be a free, Christian act of obedience at all, but an act of submission to man.

Finally, every church, from a knowledge of its own internal affairs and interests, is the most competent to deliberate, decide, and act definitely upon them. Hence, on these several accounts, submission, voluntarily or involuntarily, to "the review and control" of any man, or body of men, is manifestly inconsistent with the duties and responsibilities and true dignity of a Christian church. Congregational churches are, thus far, independent churches.

IV. Every Congregational church is, nevertheless, bound in the spirit of the gospel, by the law of Christian brotherly love, to hold fellowship with other churches, in such ways and to such an extent as will best promote and honor the cause of Christ on earth.

Absolute and entire independency is no part of Congregationalism, as it is known in New England, or as deducible from the fundamental principles of Christian church polity here assumed. All local independent churches are but branches of the great and good olive-tree, the church of God on earth. And just as all true Christians are fraternally related to each other,



just as the individual members of a local church are related to each other, by their common relation to Christ; so Christian churches are related to each other by the same common bond of union to Christ, and bound by the same law of Christian love, to discharge the same duties toward each other, as churches, which are binding on private Christians, whether members of the same or different churches. A Christian church is simply an organized company of Christians; and whether they act individually as persons, or collectively as churches, they are bound to act according to the spirit and precepts of the gospel. Independent churches have no right to ignore or disregard the welfare of sister churches, any more than private Christians have to care for none but themselves.

Such is the fellowship of Congregational churches, in its fundamental spiritual grounds. The ends of this fellowship, in general, are to render aid and comfort, by counsel or otherwise, whenever requested by any church, even in its private affairs; also for deliberation and action in all matters of public and common concern to



the churches ; and for co-operation in all wise efforts for the maintenance of true religion, and its promulgation over all the earth.

There are occasions of sore trial and trouble in the life and experience of most churches, as of most Christians, in which the aid and sympathy of sister churches are as needful, and may be as serviceable, as in private Christian life. When needful, and especially when desired, it should be rendered. And even in some cases wherein it may be needful but not desired, as in the case of a grievous defection from the faith of the gospel on the part of the church or its pastor, it may be right and proper to tender counsel and aid in the premises. But, in all cases of this nature, the power of a Congregational council of churches is only that of fraternal advice ; which is to be commended and enforced only by the light of Christian truth and the warmth of brotherly love. The utmost that a council can do is to withdraw formal fellowship from the church or minister with whom they can no longer really walk in fellowship. And what more can any man or men do rightfully ?

The interests of common concern to churches walking together in the fellowship of the gospel are such as the following: —

(1.) The formation of a new church in their vicinity, proposing to walk in fellowship with those already existing. For, obviously, it is right, needful, and expedient, that churches should have knowledge of each other's faith, principles, and manner of life, in order that they may walk together in harmonious fellowship. And the most appropriate time and occasion for obtaining this knowledge is at the formation of the church seeking their fellowship. An *ecclesiastical* council, therefore, is the appropriate body to act in the formation of a Congregational church, whenever such a council can be had.

(2.) The public ordination of ministers of the gospel, whether to be pastors of churches, or evangelists for the church at large.

Those called of God into the Christian ministry are called to labor in the church of Christ on earth, wherever, and in whatever department of labor, the Lord by his providence and grace may call them, whether to be pastors or evangel-

ists. On this account, and in various ways, churches of Christ, especially those of the same vicinity and walking together in Christian fellowship, have a common and a deep interest in the ordination of every one coming to labor in the midst of them, or going forth from them to the work of an evangelist. Hence they ought to have a voice and share in every such ordination service, so far as practicable. And hence it is, that a public expression of the fellowship of the churches has ever been a part of the ordination service among Congregationalists [See more on this topic under Chapter III. p. 52, &c.].

For the same or similar reasons, in their full force, it belongs to no one church, but to a council of churches, to try ministers for alleged error, or delinquency in faith or morals, and to acquit them or to "depose" them, — that is, to withdraw the fellowship of the churches from them, as the merits of the case may require. It is fitting also, when the pastoral relation is dissolved, that it be done by the sanction of a council of churches, in order that the retiring pastor may continue to enjoy the fellowship of his min-

isterial brethren and the churches if deserving of it, and be recommended to the churches at large as a good and faithful minister of the gospel.

(3.) Besides the foregoing, all other matters and occasions affecting the interests of spiritual religion, and the growth in grace and numbers of the churches, are matters of common concern to them all; and therefore proper subjects of stated or occasional deliberation and action among them, yet always and only in a fraternal spirit and way, by means of Christian wisdom, truth, and love alone.

(4.) In like manner, the common relation of local churches to the Redeemer's kingdom on earth, and their common love to him and his cause, warrant and demand of them to unite voluntarily in all good enterprises and efforts, for the diffusion of Christian truth and the institutions of the gospel in all lands. In what way, and by what common agencies, this can be done to the best advantage, is a subordinate matter, which may well be left to Christian wisdom and experience.

Such are the leading traits of Congregationalism. It is a system of church government intended for, and adapted to, a church of true Christians ; calling for the diffusion of Christian knowledge and piety, wisdom and activity, among all the members of the church ; thereby training the younger to take the place of the elder brethren when they shall be taken away, and in general calling into exercise the Christian virtues, and particularly the chief of them all, Christian charity. And this is no small recommendation in its favor. If the affairs of a church are ever neglected, or wrongly managed, under this system the fault is not in the system, but in the church or some of its members. And, in that case, the wiser remedy seems to be,—not to substitute a more imperious sway of government over the church, which will settle matters “authoritatively” over the minds of parties unconvinced and over hearts unreconciled ; but with prayer and brotherly effort to infuse more of the mind of Christ into the church and its delinquent or recreant members. For, without this, nothing truly valuable or desirable can be accomplished under any form of church government.

Traces of Congregationalism, as a system growing out of religious principle and the spiritual life of the churches, are found in the history of the apostolic age and that immediately succeeding, all due allowance being made for the pre-eminent influence of the apostles and other inspired men as the organs of the Holy Spirit in communicating divine truth, and as eminently holy men of prior and greater attainments in Christian knowledge and wisdom; allowance also being properly made for the fact, that the early churches were naturally and unavoidably influenced by the forms and habits of social life, both civil and sacred, to which they had been accustomed. These, for the most part, were not of a strictly popular or republican character. The Jewish Church was governed by a hierarchy. The polity of the Jewish synagogue had, indeed, more of the popular element in it; yet the powers of government in it were vested, not in the people, but in the rulers of the synagogue. Its polity was that of Jewish Presbyterianism. And it was solely because of the counteracting principles of Christianity, and of Christian brotherly



love in the primitive churches, that we see so much of popular free government, and so little of Jewish aristocratic power, in the polity and life of the primitive churches. It is an unwarrantable assumption, that the early churches were organized on the model of the Jewish synagogue, and that this was to be the model for all coming time. The names and official titles, indeed, of the ministers of the churches, were taken partly from the synagogue polity, and partly from Grecian civil life. But it by no means follows that the functions and prerogatives of these offices were the same in the Christian church as in Jewish or Greek communities. The names were transferred to a new system of religion and church polity, founded on the Christian life of the church and its members. Hence there was so much *as there was* — more than in Jewish Presbyterianism — of the fraternal, popular principle in primitive church polity. Even the election of an apostle to fill up the original twelve, from which Judas fell, also the election of deacons (Acts i. and vi.), devolved on the church as the brethren. “But their government [that



of the elders and bishops] by no means excluded the participation of the whole church in the management of their common concerns. . . . The whole church at Jerusalem took part in the deliberations respecting the relations of the Jewish and Gentile Christians to each other ; and the epistle drawn up after these deliberations was likewise in the name of the whole church. The epistles of the Apostle Paul, which treat of various controverted ecclesiastical matters, are addressed to whole churches ; and he assumes that the decision belongs to the whole body. Had it been otherwise, he would have addressed his instructions and advice, principally at least, to the overseers of the church (see 1 Cor. v. 3-5 ; vi. 5). Thus the constitution of these churches was entirely democratic" [Neander, "Planting and Training," p. 91, 93].

If, in the succeeding dark ages, Congregationalism disappears almost wholly from the history of Christianity, the reason is obvious. What is its future mission in the church and in the world, is in the hands of Him who ruleth over all.

## CHAPTER VII.

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

PROPOSITION.—*Church Discipline is an exercise of Church Government, a labor of brotherly love, in relation to offenses which may arise in the church against the faith professed, or the covenant duties acknowledged by the members.*

SO long as the people of God are not yet made perfect in holiness, and they live in a world full of temptation, “offenses must needs come.” “For in many things, we are all offenders.”

To meet this exigency, church discipline is instituted as an ordinance of Christ in his church; and no less in the circumstances would it be prompted by brotherly love, pure and unfeigned, even if nothing were said about it in the Holy Scriptures. It is a process the sole object of which is to reclaim the erring or delinquent one, by means of Christian truth and

loving kindness if practicable ; and if not, then to maintain the purity of the church, and the honor of religion in the world. Love to Christ and his cause, no less than love to the brethren, lies at the foundation of church discipline, and should never be wanting from the exercise of it. It is a covenant church duty, incumbent on every church no less than public worship or sacramental services. As no man can thrive in the religious life who dallies with sin or habitually neglects duty, so no church can prosper spiritually wherein the duties of church discipline are neglected or disregarded. The absence of discipline is either a sign of a church unusually pure and perfect, or a sure sign of one morally weak, diseased, moribund, whatever its numbers, wealth, or social position may be.

But hardly less deplorable than the utter neglect of it, is the exercise of discipline in a wrong spirit, or undertaken for any other end, public or private, than that for which it is appointed as one of the means of grace. It should never be undertaken or prosecuted by any one but in the spirit of brotherly love, pure,

unfeigned, and fervent. In this lies all the adaptation or efficiency it has for accomplishing any good in the church. Without this it is likely to stir up strife, and to harden the heart, instead of converting any one from the error of his ways.

For scriptural examples or precepts respecting Christian church discipline, see Matt. xviii. 15-18; 1 Cor. v. 1-5 and vi. 1-8; 2 Thess. iii. 6; Titus iii. 10-11, and other passages.

Here an important practical question arises: Is any and every error from the faith, or delinquency from covenant duty, a proper subject for church discipline? And, if not, what offenses are proper subjects for it?

It is obvious at once, that every offense against religious truth and duty can not be made a matter of church discipline. For then the process must needs be continually going on: occasions would occur for it every day and hour of our lives. "For what man is there that liveth and sinneth not?" Much, therefore, that is faulty or defective in Christian character and conduct must be borne with, in the exercise of that char-

ity which "suffereth long and is kind," and be hopefully left to the corrective influence of the ordinary means of grace. Whenever the faults and failings now referred to indicate, not so much a corrupt state of the heart and a perverse will, as deficient knowledge, a weak faith, or languid love and zeal in the service of God, the more excellent remedy is to enlighten the mind, and endeavor to kindle up the decayed love and zeal of the erring one. This is a work for brotherly kindness and charity, to do as opportunity may offer in the ordinary intercourse of Christian life; and "it will cover a multitude of sins."

It is confessedly difficult, nay, impossible, to draw a sharp line of distinction between the matters that may and those which may not be appropriate for church discipline, at all times and in all cases. As cases arise, the wisdom that God giveth liberally to every man and every church that asketh for it will be profitable, and usually sufficient to direct.

However, the following may be taken in general terms as a designation of such errors in

doctrine and in practice as may properly be made subjects of church discipline.

(1.) The denial of any fundamental doctrine of the gospel system of saving truth, as held by the church. The denial of such a doctrine brings into question whether the person denying the truth really believes in Christ to the saving of his soul, and should be a member of the church, besides being a hostile attack on the truth which the church is bound to defend.

(2.) All serious theoretical errors which lead directly to the rejection of any fundamental saving truth of the gospel, or which, reduced into actual practice, counteract the influence of saving truth, and lead necessarily to unbelief in Christ and impenitence in sin.

(3.) Sins of omission or commission against the more prominent duties of the church covenant, when deliberately committed, or persistently continued in; such as the neglect of public worship, the communion of the Lord's table, and the like.

(4.) Offenses against Christian morality, especially such as are aggravated from their



unholy nature or circumstances ; such as unchastity, drunkenness total or partial, sabbath-breaking, and the like.

What, now, is the proper course which the process of discipline should take respecting offenses properly disciplinable? Good motives and the right Christian spirit are indeed of the first importance ; but good order is also conducive to a happy issue in church discipline. It serves as a check upon too hasty, impatient decisions.

Here the rule given by Christ (Matt. xviii. 15-18) first claims our attention (comp. Luke xvii. 3, 4).

This rule, indeed,—given before the Christian church was organized, and for the use of his immediate disciples then with him,—applies by its express terms only to offenses against persons. But the spirit which it breathes, and the wisdom from above which it embodies, commend it as the leading rule of Christian discipline with offenders in all cases, and make it binding on Christians and churches of all time,—binding especially as to its spirit and intent.

The rule seems to have been called for and



given at the time, not so much as a prescribed legal form, as a *caveat* against the spirit and practice of church government then prevalent in the synagogues of the Jews, in which the legal spirit, not to say a vindictive, persecuting spirit, often took the place of that brotherly love and kindness which were to be the essential elements of discipline in the Christian church. Indeed, from the very nature of Judaism, church government under it partook of the nature of civil government. Its "church courts" were also the civil courts of the nation; and they enforced their mandates magisterially by the infliction of pains and penalties. The reformation of offenders by means of moral truth and brotherly love had little or no place in it. But, under the gospel, church government partakes of the nature and intent of the gospel itself. Its true spirit is that of brotherly love; its only efficiency is that of moral truth on the heart and conscience; and its sole intent, the good of the offender and the purity of the church. Punishment has no place in Christian church government.

Like all the pointed and pithy sayings of Christ,

this rule is to be interpreted and followed according to its spirit and intent. Indeed, to follow "the steps" of the rule ever so closely, but with a spirit and a purpose alien to it, is no real observance of it at all; and no good can come from it when so followed, but much mischief, as has often and sadly been the case in all churches. Here, as in every thing Christian, "the letter killeth : it is the spirit that maketh alive."

That this rule should be followed strictly in form, as well as in spirit, in all cases of "private offenses," there can be no question. The steps to be taken are just such as would have been prescribed by the wisdom from above among brethren, even had the rule not been given by the Master.

*The First Step.* — "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

First of all, let it be noticed here, that it is the offended, the injured, or aggrieved brother who is directed to go to the offender, and to labor with him in private. In this, the rule runs counter

to the feelings of fallen human nature, so apt to be irritated and revengeful in such cases ; but it is formed on the pattern of the work of redeeming grace, in which “when we were sinners Christ died for us,” and through which “we love God, because he first loved us.” Nevertheless, it should also be noticed that hereby the offending party is by no means exonerated from what is his manifest and immediate duty ; namely, to go forthwith to the injured brother, and fully confess his fault, ask forgiveness, and do whatever works meet for repentance the case may require. If he neglects to do this, he only adds sin to sin, hardens his own heart against penitence, and makes the further application of the rule necessary.

The privacy enjoined in this step of labor is an exceedingly wise and important item in it, on many accounts. The object of this privacy, however, is not to screen offenders, or cover up iniquity ; but that the labor of brotherly love may be prosecuted under the most favorable circumstances to a happy issue. The rule requires us to deal wisely with fallen human nature in our-

selves and in others, and to give no occasion to pride to interfere, and obstruct the labor of love. It forbids absolutely the practice of, first of all, publishing abroad the grievances which one has sustained, or alleges to have sustained, from a Christian brother ; and this, as is usually done, to gratify a tattling or revengeful or mischief-making disposition. To do so is a gross sin against this rule of Christ, and against the whole law of Christian love : it inflicts a wound on the cause of Christ in the world, is itself a breach of covenant obligations, and an offense against the brother publicly complained of. Yet the rule on this point is not to be so strictly interpreted as to prohibit the injured party from going to his pastor or other person to ask counsel respecting it ; nor even, in some peculiar cases, to employ a substitute in the step, — as, for instance, in the case of an aggrieved sister in certain cases, or that of a very young, or inexperienced person.

*The first step* of labor under the rule may be distinctively called the step of fraternal discipline. It need not be, and in most cases it ought not to be, limited to a single brief inter-

view between the parties. And it should never be taken for the mere purpose of so complying with the rule that the case may be brought before the church. It should be undertaken and prosecuted solely for the purpose of "gaining thy brother," — gaining him over to right views of his conduct and duty in the premises. When even one sheep in a hundred goes astray, we should do what we can to bring him back into ways of righteousness (see Matt. xviii. 14). And when so undertaken, and pursued wisely and in the right spirit, it is the most hopeful step of the whole process here enjoined; and, when successful, it is the most prolific of good to all concerned, and of honor to the Christian religion.

*The Second Step.* — "And if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

The brother or brethren chosen to assist the first should be, as far as possible, candid, discreet, impartial men, who are by no means committed to the opinions or rectitude of the brother whom they assist, any more than to those of

the alleged offender. Their duty and work under the rule is to pursue the same course of action in private with the alleged offender, and to pursue it in the same brotherly spirit, aiming at the same desirable result, — “the gaining of thy brother,” as is enjoined by the rule in the preceding step of labor. Thus, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” That is to say, in the labor with the alleged offender, their united testimony respecting what appears to them to be his duty in the case will be more prevalent than that of the first, the offended party alone; and it may lead him to see his error, and persuade him to repentance. (In this sense witnessing is often used in the Scriptures. Isa. lv. 4; John xviii. 37; Acts xxii. 15; Rev. xi. 3). Moreover, the one or two assistant brethren may see cause to testify to the original “laboring brother,” that he is in error, and so bring the process to a happy issue. As faithful witnesses for God, they should do this if they see any cause for it. It is very seldom that all the blame is wholly on one side. But, if the case must be brought before the church,



then their united testimony may serve to bring the whole matter fully and fairly before the church. And then their special agency in the case is ended.

*The Third Step.* — “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but, if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

Here, first of all, it would seem to be incumbent on the church to inquire respecting the alleged offense, whether it ought to have been made a matter of church discipline at all. And if they find that it ought rather to have been borne with (1 Cor. xiii. 7), and left for remedy to the ordinary means of grace, they may now dismiss it with suitable advice and exhortation.

Another preliminary inquiry seems also to be incumbent on the church; namely, whether the private steps of this labor of love have been taken and pursued in the right spirit. And if it appears that they had not been taken and pursued in the right spirit, they may see fit to remand the case to the laboring brethren with suitable admonition. But if the church find the



case to have been suitably conducted thus far, or even if the church can see no hope of good by remanding it, they will then proceed to hear the matter, to examine into the alleged facts in the case, and to judge of it and of their brother, the alleged offender, in a calm, impartial manner, by the light of divine truth, the guidance of true wisdom, and in the exercise of Christian charity, "which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

In all this, however, the church is not a "court of judicatory," before which the parties are cited, and must be heard at the demand of "the prosecutor," and by which the case is to be judicially tried, as in civil courts. But the church is simply a company of believers in Christ, a band of brethren in the Lord, united by covenant with God and each other, and now met to discharge a covenant duty toward one or more of the members. And, in doing so, no church should be shackled by an unbending prescribed form of procedure, nor by the technicalities of civil courts; but should be free to conduct their proceedings on Christian principles, under the guidance of "sanctified common sense."

Of course, throughout the whole process, the brother labored with should have the case clearly and fully presented before him, and be allowed all reasonable time and opportunity for his defense.

But if, after due investigation, they are constrained to adjudge the accused brother or sister to be verily guilty, the church has now incumbent upon it and its members to pray for him as such, to admonish him of his error, and endeavor to lead him to repentance for the same. In one word, the labor of brotherly love now devolves on the church for the gaining of the one who has gone astray in the wilderness of sin or unbelief. How long and by what means this should be done must be left to the wisdom of the church and the character of the case.

Then if, after sufficient time and efforts have been expended for his reclamation, he remains obdurate and impenitent, the last painful duty of the church toward him for his good and for the purity of the church, remains to be faithfully and solemnly performed. That is excommunication from the church.

But there are many cases, perhaps most cases of this kind, such in their nature and circumstances as to leave ground to hope that the delinquent member may be, after all, a child of God, though grievously gone astray, and as yet impenitent for his sin. In such cases, a temporary *suspension* from the communion of the church has been usually substituted for final excommunication. The final issue of all cases, according to the rule, is excommunication. "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican;" that is, as an unconverted man of the world. But the final issue is suspended for the time being; and, by the suspension of the member from church privileges, the purity of the church is maintained and the honor of religion vindicated. The suspended member is still a member of the church; and his brethren are still in duty bound to pray and labor for his recovery, so long as there is any hope of recovery.

Finally, excommunication is appropriate, and is the bounden duty of the church in all cases wherein there is no reasonable ground left for

hope that the guilty and impenitent one is a Christian at all, but where, on the contrary, the whole testimony and history of the case constrain the church to conclude that he is still "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity" (Acts viii. 23). As the act of receiving one into the membership of a church implies their belief and hope that he is united to Christ by faith; so the act of excommunication implies that the church now believes the excommunicated one to be still an unbeliever in Christ, an impenitent sinner. And henceforth they are to regard and treat him as such. Whatever obloquy attaches to the act arises from the crime committed, or the peculiar circumstances of each case, not from the doings of the church.

It is a question with some, whether, in the case of gross offenses against morality, or of delinquency in the more prominent duties of the covenant, the private steps of labor according to the rule must be taken. By these offenses no one person in particular is injured: but all are grieved, religion is dishonored, and Christ wounded in the house of his friends; and, by

the rule, no one in particular is pointed out and directed to go and tell him of his fault and his duty in the premises. Such a case should not be left untouched or postponed for any cause whatever. The injury sustained by religion and the church is one far more grievous than any private wrong can be. What, then, is to be done?

Manifestly, if any brother, moved by zeal for the interests of religion, feels it to be his duty to undertake the process of discipline, it is proper for him to do so, and to take the private steps of labor required by the rule. But if, as is apt to be the case, hardly any one is disposed to take upon himself the duty, and the cause of Christ is left to suffer from the neglect, it would seem to be perfectly proper for the church as a body, or a committee of the church appointed for such a purpose, to proceed in the case according to the spirit and intent of the rule, and by its form of procedure as nearly as may be. Public, gross, flagrant offenses call for little or no delay, or for dealing in private. In no such case should the cause of Christ be left

to suffer for the sake of tenderness toward offenders, or for the sake of technicalities in proceedings. The church is competent to suspend its rules, and to make one — always in the exercise of Christian wisdom and fidelity — suitable for such cases. “The wisdom from above is *first pure*, then peaceable, gentle,” &c.

It is exceedingly important that the action of a church in all cases, especially in the ultimate decision of a case of discipline, should be harmonious, and entirely unanimous if possible. No matter of great moment should be passed by a bare or small majority of votes. But here, also, no rule or principle to govern in all cases can be laid down. But if the guidance of the Spirit of God be sought and cherished by the church in their deliberations and doings, if in them they have a single eye to the glory of God, and are animated throughout by a becoming Christian disposition, cases of dissension and discord can hardly occur. It is when willfulness takes the place of enlightened wisdom; when favoritism supplants fidelity to Christ; when heated partyism sets aside calm reasoning; in a word, when



church discipline is conducted in the spirit of worldly litigation in civil courts, — that unhappy and disastrous results follow from church discipline. But, when rightly and faithfully performed, it has a moral power in it which men can not resist, and which Heaven approves and blesses. “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The blessing of Heaven, which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow therewith, is here emphatically promised upon church discipline faithfully performed, no less than upon the gospel faithfully preached.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## PUBLIC WORSHIP — PRAYER AND PRAISE.

PROPOSITION. — *That form or mode of public worship is most suitable for the Christian religion and church, which allows at once a free and full utterance to the existing sentiments of the devout heart, and a ready adaptation of the exercise to the ever varying circumstances of the worshipping assembly.*

PUBLIC worship, strictly speaking, includes only prayer, and songs of praise. The preaching of the gospel is a different exercise.

Public prayer is an exercise in which the whole congregation professedly unite in offering up before God their common confessions, petitions, thanksgivings, and adorations.

It is not, therefore, a vicarious, priestly service, which their minister performs in their behalf, and of which they are, or may be, simply spectators and auditors; but it is a solemn transaction between them personally and God the hearer of

prayer. Those who are merely spectators and auditors of the exercise thereby shut themselves out from the worship while in the worshiping assembly, and from the blessings and benefits of the exercise.

In common prayer, the people professedly unite, as with one mind and one heart, in the devotional sentiments and feelings offered up.

It follows from this, that public prayer in a language unintelligible to the people is a gross absurdity, and can be consistent only with the false idea, that it is a vicarious offering made by a priest for the people, and not a personal offering freely made by the people. The people must hear and understand the language of public prayer in order to unite in it. (See 1 Cor. xiv. 14-16).

It follows also, or at least it is becoming, that the worshiping assembly should agree in some common attitude and manner, so far as consistent with due solemnity and the spirit of the exercise. The attitude of standing up, or kneeling, seems to be the posture most consonant with Scripture and the nature of the exercise.

As to the Oriental method of prostration of the whole body, it seems to be too exclusively Oriental and excessively formal, besides inconvenient, for Christian worshipping assemblies.

But, in order to union in public prayer, it is indispensable that the congregation should unite in some common form of prayer. This can be done either by following the minister, or him who leads in the vocal utterance, with the tacit and cordial assent of the mind and heart, or by all uttering orally some prescribed form of prayer.

Here, then, the inquiry is raised, whether written forms of prayer, prescribed for public use, or prayer extemporaneously offered by the minister, and joined in mentally by the people, is most appropriate for the exercise, and conducive to edification in it. And first, respecting the Lord's Prayer, the question is, was it to be used invariably as a liturgical form of prayer in public worship?

It would seem, at first sight, that it was thus prescribed, from the words introductory to it in Luke xi. 2, "When ye pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven," &c. But Matthew intro-

duces it with these words : “ After this manner, therefore, pray ye ” (Matt. vi. 9). Hence it is evident that this form was given for our instruction respecting the brevity, simplicity, comprehensiveness, and filial spirit of Christian prayer, in opposition to the prolixity, verbosity, and unmeaning tautologies used by the Pharisees and by the heathen in their forms and manner of prayer. Compare the publican’s prayer with that of the Pharisee (Luke xviii. 9–14). See also 1 Kings xviii. 26 and 36–37.

That the Lord’s Prayer may be used occasionally in prayer, both public and private, no one doubts. But if it was prescribed as a verbal form to be invariably used, in accordance with the words “ When ye pray, say, Our Father,” &c., then no other form can be properly used in Christian worship ; for no other in the Bible is given with these words, “ When ye pray, say,” &c. This would prove too much. It would show that the apostles and other primitive Christians did wrong in using the various forms recorded and used by them. Nor have we any historical record that they ever used the Lord’s

Prayer as a prescribed liturgical form. But, indeed, those churches which are most strenuous for liturgical forms do not confine themselves to the use of this, but prepare and prescribe others also to be used with it.

On the general question before us, — whether written and prescribed forms of prayer are preferable to extemporaneous prayer uttered by him who leads in the exercise,—the following considerations seem to be decisive for the latter : —

(1.) The spirit and warmth of devotion are more naturally excited and nourished in the worshipers by uniting with their own beloved and well-known pastor, and in prayer coming direct from his own mind and heart, than by uniting in or repeating the forms of a book prepared by other men in other times. .

The sympathetic influence of living men as living men, sanctified as it is in the church by the grace of God and guided by divine truth, is a principle that underlies all the institutions of the church and its very existence. The ministry of the living preacher is based upon it: otherwise, the Bible alone would have been the all-sufficient

means of religious instruction and edification. And any preacher who should confine himself to the constant repetition of a book of sermons composed by other men, or even a repetition of the sacred text of God's word, from sabbath to sabbath and year to year, would find himself shorn of his power as a preacher. He would lack the sympathy of a living man on living men.

This principle of human sympathy is never to be ignored in the consideration of public religious services.

In the public devotional services of the church, it has its influence, and in them may be as efficacious for spiritual good as in the preaching of the gospel. For no other conceivable reason is public worship instituted at all, than that a sanctified social sympathy may be enlisted to promote and spread the spirit of true and fervent devotion among the worshipers. And there can be no question that public prayer, coming warm and direct from the pastor's mind and heart, is the most efficacious means for exciting and sustaining the devotional sympathies and feelings of



the flock, who know and revere their earthly shepherd as a holy man of God.

(2.) Extemporaneous prayer can readily embrace the ever-varying occasions, wants, and circumstances of the congregation. But set and prescribed forms of prayer can never do this, except in vague general expressions.

The pious mind recognizes God's hand in all things and events. And its devotional craving is not satisfied with the utterance of vague generalities respecting them; but goes into details and particulars in its confessions of sin, and supplications for mercies, and thanksgiving for divine goodness. The devotional exercises of pious men recorded in the Bible and in other writings abundantly confirm this remark. What a particularity, what a directness and detail, and what an ever-fresh variety withal, we see in the prayers of David, of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others of all times!

Now, the pastor of a church who is intimately acquainted with his flock and their circumstances, and who is deeply interested in their welfare, is manifestly the most competent man to prepare



a book of common prayer for them, if one be needed at all. But, fully to meet the exigencies of the case, he must needs write it anew, in part at least, from week to week, in order to particularize in it the events, wants, and circumstances of his people from time to time, so as to satisfy and nourish the piety of his people, who would see and acknowledge God's hand in all that befalls them. But this would be tantamount to the practice of extemporaneous public prayer, which, by the way, need not be unpremeditated prayer.

But, if tied down to the use of a printed prayer-book, he can do nothing of the kind. Such forms, prepared and prescribed for use in public worship, can only be general, and comprehensive of only the most common, and commonly-recurring wants and circumstances of a congregation. The prayer-book must of necessity ignore the particular events and circumstances of the people for the time passing; in which, however, the very yearnings of humanity in the people may cry aloud for the sympathy and prayers of the pastor and church at the time.

When, for instance, events of joy or sorrow have befallen them or any of them, why is it not fitting that these should be suitably noticed in public prayer? When sickness prevails, or recent bereavement of friends near and dear has taken place, why should the pastor be debarred from carrying their afflictions to the throne of the heavenly grace in public prayer, except in the vague generalities of a prayer-book? Or when public calamities brood over the land, — when war, famine, or pestilence stalks abroad, spreading dismay and death far and near, — is it not the very despotism of stately official routine, that the man of God, leading his people to the mercy-seat, should have his mouth shut respecting those things, except in the same oft-repeated general expressions, which may indeed include all sorts of calamities, as genera include species, and until his diocesan or the house of bishops sees fit and finds time to prepare and authorize a form of public prayer to meet the case? Yet such a case was an actual occurrence in 1832, when the cholera first visited this country; and similar cases are undoubtedly happening in all

parishes and congregations from time to time, differing only in the extent and severity of the calamity. Indeed, a general prescription of the same form of public prayer for all such cases seems as unsuitable as a general prescription of the same medicine for the sick of all ages and temperaments and diseases.

(3.) The fullness and fervor of the heart in prayer find a more unfettered freedom, and sincerity a more unequivocal manifestation, in the extemporaneous form, than in the written liturgical form of public prayer.

It is not here insinuated that insincerity is necessarily connected with the use of set forms of public prayer, or that extemporaneous prayer is a sure defense against insincerity; but simply that the latter mode is preferable to the former for manifesting sincerity, fullness, and fervor of heart, in the exercise.

To be acceptable with God, prayer must be sincere; to be prevalent, it needs to be full of faith, and the love which the Holy Ghost imparts. And it is simply matter of common experience with the devout, that this fullness is attained, and

this fervor is kindled up, by the very exercise of prayer in secret or in public, provided the devout soul obtains freedom of utterance to the desires and other devotional feelings welling up within. Restraining or obstructing the flow of the devotional spirit, you impoverish the heart, and quench fervor in prayer. Giving it free utterance, as in extemporaneous prayer, you in effect enlarge the soul, and kindle up in a brighter glow the flame of spiritual devotion in it. Now, for the man of God, leading the people to the mercy-seat, this is no small recommendation of the extemporaneous mode of public prayer.

For the sanctified human sympathy of the living man on living men, already spoken of, comes from the minister's devout heart, under God, as the stream from its fountain. Who has not felt, sometimes at least, a subduing, solemnifying, humbling, elevating influence come over his spirit, when following the voice of public or social prayer, felt to be coming from the full and warm heart of him who was the mouth of the people unto God in prayer? But if the exercise has been cold and formal, or if the appear-

ance of fervor be suspected to be insincere and put on, how hard it was to rise above the dead form on the wings of faith and love in the exercise? It is all-important, therefore, for the sake of that hallowed social influence of public prayer from which edification in devotional piety is obtained by the people worshiping, that the devout heart of the minister be not only full and fervent, but also that it have full, unfettered freedom in the utterance, and that his sincerity in it have the most unequivocal manifestation possible.

Now, it seems well-nigh self-evident, at least indisputable, that extemporaneous prayer allows this unfettered freedom and manifestation of sincerity, in a degree far beyond set and prescribed forms of public prayer. The set form may be unexceptionable in composition and enunciation; but still it is a prescribed form by which the devotional spirit of the minister is limited and fettered, and his sincerity in it can only be inferred from the charitable general conviction or assumption that he is a sincere Christian man. Whereas, in extemporaneous public

prayer, the ever-varying movements of living piety within find an unpremeditated and spontaneous utterance in tones of godly sorrow for sin, in the elated feelings of faith and hope in God, in thanksgiving, and adoration of God most high. Thus the hearts of the worshiping assembly are brought into a closer contact with the devout heart of the minister leading them in prayer; they find an echo, an answering voice, in their own souls to the voice of his devout spirit; their hearts become enlarged by his fullness, and warmed by his fervor; and, by the instinctive sympathy of the devout spirit consciously felt in themselves, they question not the sincerity of him who thus leads them to the very mercy-seat.

(4.) The tendency inherent in fallen human nature toward a superstitious reverence for, and faith in, mere forms and ceremonies, is much more facile and greater in the use of liturgical forms of worship than in the extemporaneous mode of public prayer.

The tendency here attributed to fallen human nature is too notorious in the history of all



religions on earth — the true as well as the false — to need confirmation by a formal proof. Superstition essentially consists in resting on the mere surface of religion, and trusting in mere forms and ceremonies. It ignores the essential, the spiritual element of true religious worship, and substitutes for it that which attracts the senses and captivates the imaginations, or, at best, that which gratifies the mere esthetic taste of man for the grand and beautiful in outward form.

Now, that the use of set forms and prescribed ceremonies has this dangerous and pernicious tendency is but too well evinced by the results which it has wrought out wherever such forms have been used the most exclusively, to the widest extent, and for the longest periods of time. The face of Christendom, especially the popish and Greek communities, but too well illustrate and confirm the remark just made. Though, indeed, the superstition long prevalent in these degenerate churches is not to be charged only, or chiefly, to the use of prescribed liturgical forms of worship; yet who does not see that the

use of them greatly facilitates the process of degeneracy from the primitive simplicity and purity of the church in early times, to the superstition which overshadows, and, with the multitude at least, which supersedes true spiritual devotion? The Missal, by the authorities of the church, supersedes the Bible; and canonical, priestly ceremonies supplant the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth.

This tendency, indeed, is greatly counteracted in Protestant churches which use liturgical forms, and hence the resulting superstition is greatly limited in them, by the preaching of the gospel in plainness, purity, and power, and by having the liturgy in a language which the people can understand. But still it is believed that the result of the usage in question may be seen in those Protestant communities in which set forms of public prayer have been most used and cherished. The people generally seem to have acquired an undue reverence for the forms and ceremonies of worship, apart from the living spirit and power of spiritual religion. They are heard applauding the prayer-book quite as often

and prominently as they do the Bible. They appeal to the solemn forms and order of religious service, in behalf of their church, quite as readily as to the truth as it is in Jesus and the fruits of vital godliness among them. Orthodoxy of esthetic taste in the style of church architecture and in the interior arrangement and furnishings of the house of worship, &c., is a point as prominent with many such as is the orthodoxy of the creed, or the sentiments of the liturgy.

We would by no means exclude esthetic consideration from the house of worship and its services. These need never be offensive to good taste ; but they should always be kept subordinate, and unmistakably so, to the high and holy behests of true spiritual devotion.

The worship of God in sacred song calls for but few additional remarks, inasmuch as the same general principles apply to it as to public prayer. It is an exercise essentially of the same spiritual and devotional nature with public prayer ; and the form and manner of it should be kept also subordinate, and made subservient, to

the true spiritual devotion of the heart. Spiritual ideas, a devotional spirit, and pious emotions, are the staple elements of religious worship in sacred song. Paul says, "I will sing with the spirit; and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. xiv. 15). "Be ye filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord" (Ephes. v. 19).

In this heavenly part of public worship, poetry and music contribute largely to bring the sensuous and esthetic part of our nature into harmony with a pure spiritual devotion. The poetry embodies and vivifies the spiritual ideas in images that awaken and enliven the mind, and excite the warmest emotions of the heart. The music of sacred song calls away the senses from the objects and pleasures of earth, and pre-occupies them with those of religious worship. But in order that the music may do this, and do it effectually, it must harmonize with the sentiments and devotional emotions of the worship. The style of the poetic composition must be

chaste, pure, dignified, and ennobling. The music must be simple yet winning, varied with the various sentiments and emotions of that which is sung, and ever significant of the solemn service of song in the house of God. The style of secular music, so called, is no more suitable for the worship of God than worldly thoughts or business in the house of God. And when the attention and thoughts of the worshiper is turned away from the spiritual in it, and given to the musical melody, harmony, tune, and time or rhythm, the life and substance of the worship are gone ; and the service then has degenerated into the performance of a concert for the public entertainment of musical ears ; and the house and worship of God are profaned.

It is a question worthy of the increased attention now given to it by some churches, whether congregational singing, in part at least if not entirely, is not more appropriate to Christian worship, and more conducive to the spiritual benefits derived from sacred song, than singing God's praises by a select choir. If those who sing can reap these benefits more largely than

those who listen only, surely it were altogether better that all the people should unite with the voice, as well as with the mind and heart, in sacred song. At all events, those who listen merely must unite in the service with pure minds and devout hearts; otherwise they do not worship at all the Lord God of hosts.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

PROPOSITION. — *Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only symbolical ordinances of divine appointment in the Christian church; and the most appropriate mode of their observance is that which best accords with the simplicity of the gospel and the spiritual import of each, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.*

**A**MONG the divinely-appointed means of grace, symbolical ordinances of divine service have had a place in every age of the church of God. In the Mosaic code, they were manifold; and, under that legal economy, they were minutely prescribed and punctiliously observed.

But, under the Christian dispensation, these are all summed up, as to their import, and reduced to the two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are expressly enjoined by Christ on his church, though not so minutely prescribed as were the manifold ordinances of the legal

economy. As to their import, the ancient ordinances set forth, in general and variously, man's sin and guilt, and the way of life and salvation, by atonement for the remission of sin, and by purification from the pollution of sin. Of course they were prophetic as types of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, symbolized by them all. In the New-Testament church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper symbolize the same two great, all comprehensive elements of the divine plan and work of human redemption: namely, atonement for the remission of sin, effected by the sacrificial death of Christ; and "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," by which, and not by works of righteousness, we are saved from the pollution and power of indwelling sin.

#### I. — *Christian Baptism.*

In Christian baptism, washing with pure water symbolizes "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," by which our souls must be sanctified and saved from sin. This we take to be the fundamental, doctrinal import of

the ordinance. Practically connected with this, however, it may be regarded as the visible sign and seal of the covenant between God and his people, as the badge of our discipleship to Christ, and as the dedication of ourselves and our children to God and his service. All this may and should be so, because it all grows out of the fundamental import of the ordinance. The practical uses of the ordinance may be many and various, while its symbolic doctrinal import is but one,—the spiritual baptism of the Holy Ghost.

This ordinance was evidently taken from the diverse washings of the old covenant dispensation (see Heb. ix. 10, where, in the original Greek, the word is “diverse baptisms”). In the Christian ordinance, the form is greatly simplified in accordance with the spirit of the gospel, and separated from many things of a sacrificial nature, and even civil character, with which the manifold baptisms of the Old-Testament church were combined.

No ritual ordinance, of itself, can be of any saving efficacy, but only a sacred, useful instru-

mentality. The ablutions of the Jewish church ritual were never intended to take away sin. "They could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; they could not purify the conscience from dead works to serve the living God." The ritual form can only impressively indicate the divine agency by which alone our souls are efficiently saved from sin, and perfected in holiness. This was well understood by every intelligent pious worshiper, even in the Jewish church. Thus David, in the 51st Psalm, praying for the divine forgiveness and cleansing of his soul, says, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop,\* and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Here the penitent king uses language taken from the ritual services of the ancient church, and thereby shows what their true spiritual import was. See Num. xix. 9, 19, &c. See also Ezek. xxxvi. 25, compared with Heb. x. 22, where the washing of our bodies with pure water is the sacramental symbol of

\* "Sprinkle me with hyssop," in the Septuagint.

having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience ; and this, of course, is done by the sanctifying grace of the Spirit of God.

The prophet Isaiah also, speaking of the then future Messiah and his world-wide kingdom, says (lii. 15), “ So shall he sprinkle many nations ” (see Ex. xxiv. 8, compared with Heb. ix. 19). That is, as Moses sprinkled both the book of the covenant and the people when they as a nation ratified the covenant with Jehovah, so should Christ sprinkle many nations, not one merely, but many, by the initiatory ordinance of the New-Testament church. Thus was the great commission (Matt. xxviii. 19) foretold by the prophet, — “ Go ye, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

That the fundamental idea of this sacred ordinance is that of the divine influences of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying the soul, is further evident from the New-Testament scriptures. It is evident from the fact that the influences of the Holy Spirit, or his saving and sanctifying work, is denominated a baptism, —

the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Thus 1 Cor. xii. 13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." That is, by the spiritual baptism of the Holy Ghost we have all been introduced into the body of Christ, which is his church. The ritual initiation into the visible church is baptism by water; the real initiation is the baptism of the soul by the Spirit of God, "the washing of regeneration."

See also Matt. iii. 11; John i. 33; Acts i. 5 and xi. 16; John iii. 5, "Born of the water and of the Spirit," the sign and the thing signified, baptism with water, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost; Titus iii. 5; 1 Peter iii. 20, 21; Eph. v. 26, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it [the church] by the washing of water by the word." Here the instrumentalities, baptism with water and the preaching of the gospel, seem to be meant; but the real, efficacious cleansing is that of the Holy Ghost. Acts xxii. 16: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Baptismal water can



not wash away sin; but here the ritual sign stands for the thing signified. The erroneous dogma of a baptismal regeneration of the soul with water, seemingly taught here, is emphatically contradicted in 1 Peter iii. 21. The principle of interpretation in all such passages is that of the sign for the thing signified; a well-known figure of speech, often used in the Scriptures, and of necessity used, respecting spiritual and divine things.

Here it may be noticed that the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments ascribe a cleansing efficacy also to the blood of Christ. "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." This usage is easily accounted for by the fact, that, in the ritual services of the Jewish church, blood and water mingled, water containing the ashes of the burnt offering, or blood alone, were appointed for typical cleansing on various occasions. Especially is this accounted for by the fact that the things signified by water and by blood are essentially connected, — sanctification by the washing of the Spirit, and atonement by the blood of Christ. During the old dispensation, the

sacrificial death of Christ was yet future ; and its prophetic type must needs be often presented before the worshipers. But, under the Christian dispensation, the memorial of Christ's death is set forth in the holy supper, and therefore is fitly separated from the rite of baptism. This is befitting the general simplicity, the superior clearness, and the historical character, of the Christian religion and church.

From its nature, Christian baptism is to be administered only once in each case, being a symbol of regeneration into spiritual and eternal life, the life of God in the human soul, which is kept in us "by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." The rebaptizing of any person, therefore, is a setting-forth of an erroneous and dangerous view of regeneration,—as a birth which may be repeatedly and indefinitely experienced. Baptism is no sign that a person has experienced religion, but a symbol of the way in which we experience it ; namely, by the work of the Spirit. And the covenant obligations set forth by it are binding, once for all, on all men. There is no need for rebaptizing in order to

create these obligations: they are not created, only avowed, in it. Besides, the practice of rebaptizing would magnify a ritual ordinance unduly, on the apparent assumption that there is something really efficacious and saving in it, when rightly administered and received. Let the baptismal vows be re-acknowledged and faithfully performed by the backslidden Christian: then all will be well.

*The Mode of Baptism.*—Here it is not intended to enter upon any polemic or exhaustive discussion of this topic, which has been magnified by sectarianism into an importance due to no formality under the gospel. It is proposed simply to set forth some reasons, good and sufficient, for the mode of baptism observed by us and by the greater part of the Christian world. These will be drawn chiefly from the spiritual import of the ordinance, and the language of the Scriptures in relation to it.

In the first place, the mode of Christian baptism is nowhere prescribed in the New-Testament Scriptures. In the Mosaic code of ritual laws, every ordinance is specifically and minutely

prescribed and described, and was punctiliously observed by that church under that legal dispensation. But, in the New Testament, we find no such minute prescriptions for the ordinance of baptism. Even the original institution of it is not given by any "Thus saith the Lord." The great commission (Matt. xxviii. 19) recognizes it as already in use (John iv. 1, 2). Such an omission of explicit prescription and minute description, and especially among Jews in the days of Christ on earth, is unaccountable, if the mode of baptism were a matter essential to its validity, or important for its use and end. The fact is, that, in the polity and religious services of Christianity, that which is spiritual is made fundamental; and that which is formal seems, for the most part, to have been left to be educed from, and conformed to, the spiritual import, under the guidance and sanctified wisdom of the apostles and the church, especially in the primitive age, when as yet Christianity was being developed.

If it is thought that the example of the apostles and primitive churches is an imperative pattern, binding on us in all things, minute as well

as essential, formal as well as spiritual, it should be noticed, that they, in many things, conformed to the circumstances of the times and the people, — as Paul became all things to all men that he might save some; and, in particular, that they conformed to the venerable usages of the Jewish religion, so far as these could be made subservient to the cause of Christ. In this way, undoubtedly, Christian baptism originated, as also that of John the forerunner, from the Jewish baptisms. In the examples of the apostolic age, therefore, we have to discriminate between essentials and non-essentials. In regard to the institution of the Lord's Supper, for example, were we bound punctiliously to observe it minutely after the pattern given by Christ, and enjoined as it is by the injunction, "Do this in remembrance of me," we should be bound to observe the ordinance only in the evening, to exclude female communicants, to use only unleavened bread, and to recline on couches as did Christ and his disciples. But such scrupulosity in non-essentials would minister only to superstition. But let us see what the mode of baptism was in

the apostolic age, so far as can be determined from the sacred records.

First, in regard to the meaning of the words "baptize" and "baptism," employed to designate the ordinance. The meaning of the Greek words rendered "baptize" and "baptism" in our English version, when used in relation to this ordinance, is by no means to be settled fully and finally by an appeal to their primitive import, or common usage in classic Greek, by heathen writers, on subjects altogether alien from a ritual ordinance of a holy and spiritual religion. It is well known, that, in the course of time, the meaning of words deviates much from their root-meaning; the original meaning of the word becomes modified, or altogether lost; and some new meaning grows out of the primitive root, especially on new and peculiar subjects. And it should be remembered that the New-Testament writers did not write in pure classic Greek, but in the Jewish-Greek dialect of their day; and, of course, used the words of the language in their commonly-understood meaning, at least on outward sensible things, such as these formalities.



All this is demonstrably so in regard to the words "baptize" and "baptism." Even though the primitive root of the words signified to immerse or submerge, — there is good evidence, however, that it meant *to dye*, which is done by immersing the cloth in the coloring material or otherwise, — or though immersion or submersion be a common meaning of the words, when used respecting the sinking of a ship for instance, as it is in classic Greek, yet the words are used also to mean simply to wash or bathe the person, and to be wet, as with the dew falling on one (see Daniel iv. 33, in the Septuagint). And then, after all, the question recurs, How are the words used by the New-Testament writers, especially in relation to Christian baptism?

On this inquiry we take our starting-point from the text already cited (Heb. ix. 10), where the sacred penman is compendiously designating the ordinances of divine service belonging to the Jewish church, which stood, he says, "only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances." *Diverse washings* is here a

generic rendering of the original Greek which is *diverse baptisms*. These manifold, diverse baptisms, and the mode of performing them, are minutely described in the ceremonial law of Moses; and they were always punctiliously observed by that church down to the apostolic age. The Jews were never accused of altering the ceremonies of their religion, though the party of the Pharisees were accused of a superstitious reliance on them as righteousness, and of augmenting them, to make them more imposing for popular effect (see Matt. vi. 2, 5, 16). Now, these *diverse baptisms*, so called in New-Testament Greek, were the manifold ablutions of the Mosaic code. Some of them were performed by bathing "the flesh," — the body, partially or wholly, in water. But, in most cases, sprinkling the water of purification, or other prescribed element, was the mode of baptism prescribed by the law, and observed by the church (see Num. xix., Lev. xiv., &c). The commonly-understood meaning of the Greek words "baptize" and "baptism" in the apostolic age, and among the Jews and Jewish Christians, was therefore that of

diverse ceremonial washings, or ablutions, most of which were performed by the affusion or sprinkling of water on the person and things baptized, by the hand or a finger, or by a branch of the hyssop-shrub, dipped into the prescribed liquid element.

Let us now see whether any light is thrown on this meaning and usage of the word from the gospel records. It appears that the Jews in the time of Christ still observed scrupulously the ceremonial laws respecting persons and things, clean and unclean, and that, too, with unwarrantable additions made by the elders. For the purpose of these purifications, they kept water-pots of stone, one or more, in each house: there were six at the marriage in Cana of Galilee for the large company there assembled (John ii. 6). Before eating, they ceremonially washed their hands; and this was called a baptism, or being baptized (see Luke xi. 38 in the Greek Testament; comp. 2 Kings iii. 11, for the probable mode). When they returned from the market-place, where they were peculiarly liable to contact with persons or things unclean, "they eat

not, except they wash," — "except they baptize themselves," as it is in the Greek, — of course with water drawn from one of these water-pots, kept for the purpose. They held to ceremonial washings — "baptisms" in the Greek — of cups and pots, and brazen vessels, and tables, or rather couches on which they reclined at meals (see Mark vii. 4, in the Greek). It is nowhere stated, and it is not credible, that the mode of these *ritual washings*, or baptisms, was any other than that prescribed by the law, which was the mode of affusion or sprinkling. Neither the couches on which they reclined, nor the persons of the guests, could be baptized by immersion in one of these water-pots, containing two or three firkins apiece, — to say nothing of the inconvenience and discomforts of such a mode. Thus, then, we see, that, in the time of Christ, the commonly understood meaning of the Greek words "baptize" and "baptism" was that of ritual washing, and that chiefly, if not always, in the mode of pouring, or sprinkling the unclean with water. And, of course, the New-Testament writers used the words in their commonly understood meaning.

They wrote for the people in the language understood by the people.

How, then, are we to understand the New-Testament record respecting baptism as administered by John the Baptist and by the apostles. Obviously in the same sense of the words, unless we find them defined otherwise, or modified by the circumstances of the case. But we find no such definition or circumstances as conclusively require us to assume that John's baptism was administered otherwise than as the law prescribed for ritual ablutions. His ministry was exercised, not in the temple, nor in synagogues, nor in the dwellings of men, but in the wilderness of Judæa, in the region of the Jordan, — in Enon, near Salim, “because there was much water there,” — “*many waters,*” as the Greek is, — many streams of water, needful for the common use of the great multitudes who resorted to his ministry. A small quantity of water was sufficient for baptism in any mode ; but, for thousands of people, much water was needed, and many streams were all the better.

Those to be baptized, of course, went down

the bank of the river to the water along with the Baptist, or into the water to some depth convenient for taking up a portion of the water and pouring or sprinkling it on the person to be baptized. And then, of course, they would both of them come out of the water, — or *from the water*, which is all that Greek preposition definitely means, — and ascend the bank of the river. The language and the circumstances, the places selected, and the going-down to or into the river, by no means require us to suppose that John's baptism was administered by immersion. Both the baptizer and the baptized went to or into the water, *not under* it; as was the case also with Philip and the Ethiopian. Acts viii. 38.

Neither do the circumstances of the baptism of the three thousand in the afternoon of the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41) necessitate or even permit us to suppose that they were baptized in the mode of immersion. The time needed, and the conveniences required, could not be had at that time for the immersion of three thousand persons. It was sufficient, and it was far more significant, that they should be baptized in the



mode in which the baptism of the Holy Ghost was bestowed upon them as predicted by the prophets, whose mighty grace was "poured" upon them, "came down upon them," "fell upon them" (see Acts ii. 17, 33; x. 44, 45; xi. 15, 16, — the prophetic intimations already cited from the Old-Testament Scriptures).

There remain two passages calling for our attention, — Rom. vi. 3–12, and Col. ii. 12, 13. These have seemed to some persons to set forth at once the mode of Christian baptism to be that of burial in water, and its significance to be symbolic of the burial of Christ. The latter idea calls for no further notice here, after what has already been said of the symbolic import of the ordinance. And a careful, unprejudiced attention to the intent and scope of both these passages will show that they were not designed at all to describe ritual baptism with water, but to point out the fellowship of Christians in the death of Christ (see Philip. iii. 10); their actual participation in the benefits of his death, burial, and resurrection; particularly their moral and spiritual death to sin, even as Christ died for

sin; and their being raised in newness of spiritual life unto holiness and God, as Christ was raised by the glory of the Father. And from these, which are the doctrinal contents of Christian baptism, the apostle argues the obligations that rest upon Christians to lead holy lives. Or rather, he argues substantially, that they who have been really justified by the death of Christ will be sanctified by the Spirit of God, and lead lives of holiness.

The phrases "buried with Christ," "dead with Christ," "crucified with him," "planted with him," are all evidently of the same spiritual import. And the word "*buried*" is here evidently taken as more emphatic than "dead," and more antithetic to the idea of a resurrection.

"We are buried with him by baptism into death." If baptism with water be taken as the sense here, then the passage would teach that it is by baptism with water we are made partakers of Christ's death; a dogma contrary to the whole teaching of the apostle Paul, and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And, further, the naturally close relation of

death to burial renders it superfluous and gratuitous to assume, as some do, that here there is an allusion to immersion as the mode of baptism in the apostolic age. But was that the mode? If, on other grounds, it were established that such was the mode, then the word might be so interpreted, but not otherwise.

Finally, there are reasons of congruity and of expediency, coinciding with the foregoing, in favor of the mode of baptism by sprinkling. This mode is manifestly the most simple and agreeable with the simplicity of the gospel in outward things. It is the only mode in which the sick and the dying can be baptized. And altogether it is the mode that is practicable and most convenient at all seasons and in all places. Hence it is the mode most suitable in Christianity, the more glorious dispensation of the Spirit, intended to be the religion of the whole earth, and of all ages to the end of time.

Nevertheless, we do not hold the mode of sprinkling or affusion to be essential to the validity of Christian baptism. But a ritual washing with water, symbolic of the washing of

regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, is the essential idea to be held fast in the ordinance. Let not the mode divide very friends, — the friends of Christ.

*The Proper Subjects of Baptism.* — It is evident both from the express institution of Christ and from the spiritual import of the ordinance, as also from the terms of membership in the Christian church, that baptism is intended only for those who are the regenerate children of God, and who openly become the disciples of Christ (Matt. xxviii. 19). A profession of their faith in Christ, therefore, is a requisition properly made upon those who seek Christian baptism for themselves or their infant offspring (Acts viii. 37, ii. 39).

Moreover, as already stated, consecration to God and his service is a prominent idea on the practical side of this ordinance, as also covenant relations and promises. There are, therefore, implied in its reception a special faith in God's gracious covenant with his people, and a solemn vow to fulfill the conditions of the covenant in the various relations and duties of the Christian

life. An explicit profession of such faith, and acknowledgment of covenant vows, should in all cases be made a prominent accompaniment in the administration of this ordinance. The germ of this is seen in Acts viii. 37.

Baptism is now the ritual sign and seal of the covenant between God and his people, the initiatory ordinance of the Christian church, as circumcision was under the Jewish dispensation (see Gen. xvii. 1-14; Rom. iv. 11-13; Gal. iii. 29; 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18). The forms of the two rites are, indeed, very different; but the doctrinal spiritual import, and the practical intent and use, of both are the same. The spiritual import of circumcision related to the heart and its affections, as does that of baptism (see Deut. x. 16, xxx. 6; Jer. iv. 4; Rom. ii. 29; Col. ii. 11, compared with 1 Pet. iii. 21). The Jewish rite, devised by divine wisdom and prescribed by divine authority,—and, indeed, the entire policy, so to speak, of that dispensation,—was to preserve true religion and the church in the midst of the world wholly given to idolatry, of which licentious sensuality is ever an accompaniment.

Circumcision signified specially, on its practical side, "the putting-off of the old man with his affections and lusts." The Christian rite does the same, under a form better fitted for the greater clearness and the destined wide extension of the gospel dispensation. Moreover, the proper persons on whom the two rites were to be administered, as determined by the laws of membership in each church respectively, were the same.

*Infant Baptism.* — Here, then, arises the question whether the infant offspring of believers are not also proper subjects of Christian baptism, through the faith and covenant relation of their parents, as Jewish children were under the former dispensation. This is an important question, and deserving of all candid and careful examination.

The following considerations, it is thought, will help the candid and careful inquirer to see that infant baptism is an appropriate use of Christian baptism.

1. The analogy between circumcision and baptism as covenant seals of the same covenant promises. This analogy, or rather identity as to



spiritual import and use, has already been shown. And the great covenant promise is comprehensively given in the words of the covenant as made with Abraham,—made with Abraham, but not with him or his posterity exclusively; with him simply as a believer, and a distinguished representative of all who believe in Christ (Rom. iv. 3–11; Gal. iii. 7, 14, 29). The promise was and is, “I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. xvii. 7). And in accordance with this promise, and as a perpetual memorial of it, the prescribed seal of the covenant was directed to be put on their offspring in earliest infancy. They were thus consecrated to God and his service, and, by all faithful and true Israelites, were trained for it by parental authority and instructions (see Gen. xviii. 19).

Now, it is not to be admitted for a moment, that, under the gospel, God’s covenant blessings and promises and privileges are in any respect inferior to what they were under the typical dispensation. Believers in Christ have the same covenant-keeping God, the same covenant promises substantially, and a visible sign and seal of

the covenant, namely baptism (see Acts ii. 38, 39). Why, then, should not the seal of the covenant be as appropriately affixed also on the infant children of believers now, under the more ample and perfect dispensation of covenant blessings? Thus, undoubtedly, the matter would naturally and necessarily appear to the earliest Christians who were Jews; and it would have required an express prohibition of infant baptism to have hindered them from practicing it, at least just as soon as their Jewish prejudices permitted them to see the transition from circumcision to baptism. This, indeed, was not very soon nor easily effected, as the New-Testament records show; nor were the apostles at all solicitous to have them do so speedily. Circumcision and baptism both were tolerated and practiced during the apostolic age among Christianized Jews (Acts xvi. 3). Their infant offspring already had been circumcised, and so already were children of the covenant. This accounts for the fact that but little is said of infant baptism in the New-Testament Scriptures, and that it is not until Gentiles are converted that we read of their households,

them and theirs, being all baptized together (Acts xvi. 14-15, 33; 1 Cor. i. 16). Such general statements were sufficiently explicit for the primitive churches, who knew what the practice was among them; and for us, interpreted by the light which the Old-Testament covenant throws on the New, it furnishes strong presumptive evidence, at least, that infant baptism was thus introduced gradually, as circumcision went out of use. No express institution of it in relation to the infant offspring of believers was needed. Substantially it was an old institution, modified only in form; and, of course, it would continue to be practiced unless repealed.

2. Little infants by birth inherit the corruption of fallen human nature, from which they can be saved only by "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Though infancy be "the age of innocency" as to actual transgression, yet infants have in them that which is the root of all sin, and which will in time produce a sad harvest of sin and guilt, unless a radical change of the heart in infancy be effected by the Spirit of God. The idea of

such a change of heart in the infant is by no means absurd. With God all things are possible ; and, in all cases, such a change is his gracious and supernatural work. True, in the case of those of mature minds, the change is usually preceded by conviction of sin, and followed by faith and repentance unto life, at least so far as we can see into it. But, in the case of infants, there is no actual sin to be convicted of nor repented of, nor sufficient maturity of mind for such exercises. In their case, therefore, regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit exclusively, and unaccompanied at the time by any conscious exercises of the human free agency. Moreover, the Scriptures tell us of some who were sanctified from the womb (Jer. i. 5 ; Luke i. 15) ; that is, not simply destined, but sanctified by the Spirit, for the work given them.

If, then, infants have, or may experience, the baptism of the Spirit, spiritual and saving infant baptism, why should not the sign, baptism with water, be administered to them? There is no incongruity, therefore, or intrinsic impropriety, in the practice of infant baptism.

3. Infant baptism is a means of grace for the salvation of children in their infancy, through the faith and fidelity of their parents in God's covenant promises.

We may indeed *assume* that all children dying in the infancy of unconscious moral agency will be saved. This must be done for them by the Holy Spirit. "But, for this, God will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." And simply praying is not all necessary to be done in order to receive God's blessings. God answers prayer in his own way through the means of grace; and what can be the means of grace through which God will bestow upon parents the inestimable blessing of the Spirit's saving work on the hearts of their infant offspring, but the consecrating of them to God in baptism? Admitted, the little one has no consciousness of what is done for it, it takes no part in it. The same you may say of prayer for your children. But what of that? If any thing, then there is no propriety in praying for them, or for any who can not, and, worse, will not, pray for themselves. It is no valid objection at all to

infant baptism, that the infants can take no part in the service.

The use and utility of infant baptism, as a means of grace practically, arise from its influence in exciting the desires and strengthening the faith of believing parents in the covenant promise of God to them and theirs. It is an impressive exposition of the need of the washing of regeneration for their helpless offspring, and a visible pledge on God's part of bestowing it in answer to their prayers and according to their faith. Such was the influence of the rite of circumcision on pious Hebrews, and such is the practical tendency and use of all the ordinances of God's house. And then, ever afterwards, the baptismal consecration of their children in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, has a great and lasting influence to quicken the faith and fidelity of parents in educating their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Baptismal consecration is but the beginning of parental duty toward them, even as the Spirit's regenerating work is but the beginning of his sanctifying work. It is thus



the full blessings of the covenant are procured for us and our children ; as God said, “ For I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” This, moreover, is God’s way of raising up a holy seed to serve him from among his people (see and compare Mal. ii. 15, and 1 Cor. vii. 14). *Holy offspring*, ritually and really.

The thought should not be entertained for a moment by any Christian parent, that his infant offspring must of course grow up unregenerate, in impenitency and sin, until they be old enough to understand the gospel and pray for themselves. God has arranged and promised that it should be otherwise ; and, if they do grow up an ungodly seed, sin lieth at the door. The salvation of infants who live to grow up in this world is as well secured by covenant promise as that of those who die in infancy. The promise was conditioned under the old dispensation, by fidelity in regard to the seal of the covenant ; and now,

under the same covenant, the same condition is of course required in regard to infant baptism, and the same faith and fidelity in covenant duties.

Thus, as we think, is it established by a large mass of indirect and circumstantial testimony, and by analogical reasoning from the ancient dispensation, that baptism has taken the place of circumcision, and that infant baptism is an important and proper use of Christian baptism.

## II. — *The Lord's Supper.*

The only other ordinance of the Christian church is the Lord's Supper. It is symbolic of the atonement by the death of Christ for the remission of sin, the sins of many (see Matt. xxvi. 26–28; Luke xxii. 19, 20; 1 Cor. xi. 23–26).

It is not a sacrificial service, but a symbol and a memorial of the one great sacrifice of “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” — the only real sacrifice which ever did or could take away sin.

Communing in it is significant of our faith in

Christ, and thereby partaking of the benefits of his death, together with love and gratitude, penitence, and whatever Christian feeling may be appropriate on the occasion. Consequently believers in Christ only, and they as in covenant with God, are entitled to the communion of the Lord's body: those only are qualified spiritually to partake of it in a worthy manner, and not to their own condemnation. The terms of communion are those of discipleship to Christ. No man nor any church may rightfully add to them, or take from them. Some good and reasonable evidence of faith in Christ, and love to him in sincerity and truth, is all that any church can rightfully require for the privilege of at least occasional communion with them at the Lord's table. But this much should ever be required. It is an ordinance for the edification of the people of God, and not for the world living in wickedness, except as a spectacle to them of the death of Christ for sinners. The observance of it by the church to the end of time sets forth the bond of union among all God's people on earth, through their common union with

Christ. Improperly, therefore, is it ever made a line of division among any of the tribes of the Christian Israel. And especially to make conformity in the mode of baptism or the mode of worship a test of fitness to the holy Christian communion, or a condition of admission to it, is utterly alien from the spirit of Christ and the gospel. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant, and shuttest him out from his and your Father's house? Even the twelve apostles were never baptized at all in any mode, that we know of; and yet Jesus sat down with the twelve.

In regard to the mode of observance of the Lord's supper, little need be said. Simplicity, decency, and a becoming solemnity, should characterize the ordinance. Sitting around our heavenly Father's board seems the most suitable posture. There is nothing to be adored in the consecrated bread and wine; and therefore kneeling seems to be inappropriate at the Lord's table.

The times when and the frequency with which this ordinance should be observed are circum-

stances which have not been prescribed, nor clearly intimated in the Scriptures. In the primitive age of Christianity, it seems to have been observed every Lord's day, and at other times. On the whole, this seems to be a point left, like other non-essential things, to be settled by the churches in the exercise of Christian wisdom, according to varying circumstances, and the demands, never to be lost sight of, of Christian edification.

## CHAPTER X.

## CONCLUSION.

SUCH is Congregationalism. From the whole foregoing expositions of it, the following conclusions may be drawn:—

1. Congregationalism is manifestly Christian and scriptural. Clear traces of it are seen in the New-Testament Scriptures as the polity of the primitive churches, and in the earliest historic records of Christianity after the primitive age. It is rooted and grounded in that which is spiritual in our holy religion; and it can commend and vindicate itself to all Christians from the spiritual views and experience of an enlightened piety.

Yet for that very reason, while Congregationalists may be warmly attached to their own system of church polity, they are not superstitious,



nor intolerant for it as a form. Its spiritual root is of more consequence than the form ; and the form chiefly valuable and desirable for the means of nurture conveyed through it, — spiritual religion in the heart and in the church.

Consistently they can hold Christian fellowship with all in every place who call upon the same Lord, — their Lord and ours : they can sit with them in communion at the Lord's table, and labor with them in all wise and Christian ways for the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth. If left alone to labor in the field which is the wide world, they will do so ; but they do not seek to be alone. Brotherhood is the vital formative idea, and brotherly love and fellowship the living spirit and function, of their system. But grace, mercy, and peace be upon the tribes of the true Israel of God, in all their habitations and modes of working for his glory.

2. Congregationalism tends pre-eminently to develop and cherish a healthy and vigorous style of Christian life among all the members of its churches. Soon as the young Christian, with the youthful glow of the religious life yet in him, is

introduced into the sacred brotherhood, he finds himself there, not as a child, or as a subject subordinate to some higher ruling power in the church, but as a brother among brethren. The responsibilities of church membership at once rest upon him ; and these require and lead him at once to take a deep interest and an active part, according to his ability, in the deliberations and affairs of the church. The mere call made upon him for his vote in church affairs tends to awaken and form in him an independent way of thinking for himself, and of acting from well-considered and intelligent views, from right moral principles, and from conscientious convictions. It tends continually to kindle afresh the love of Zion in him ; and this sweetly constrains him to lay himself out in behalf of her welfare, while yet the management of affairs is not committed altogether to his inexperienced hands. In the church he finds brethren of superior Christian age and experience and wisdom in the religious life, — brethren who take a deep fraternal interest in him their younger brother, and who are ever ready wisely to temper and guide aright

his youthful zeal, and, generally, to be his exemplars and tutors in all Christian activities and attainments. Thus the rising generation of the church is trained, as in a school of practice, for a ripe manhood in the religious life, and to keep alive this same healthy and vigorous tone of piety in the church when the fathers and elder brethren will be no more in the church here. The same tendencies go to form in Congregational church members an active tone of personal piety and manly ability for eminent usefulness in the world, according to their several abilities and opportunities. And the same influences make such a church eminently a nursery for the Christian ministry, wherein the hidden talent of some chosen one is brought to light, and the heart inspired from above and around him to say, "Here, Lord, am I, send me" into thy vineyard, not for filthy lucre's sake, nor for eminence in social position or in literary rank, but to win souls for Christ at home, or to carry the gospel far hence among the Gentiles.

Such are some of the normal tendencies of the working of Congregationalism. And such,

in some good measure, have been its results, wherever it has had freest scope and least of hindrance, to work out, along with the working of divine grace, its legitimate results. Impediments and hindrances beset every system of social life and action on earth. Perfection is only for heaven. But in these cases wherein results have been unhappy, in all candor they should be laid to the charge, not of the system of Congregational church polity, but to the wrong spirit and to the maxims and manners of the world in the management of affairs, which sometimes have been lamentably brought into Congregational church doings, contrary to the true spirit and principles of the system itself. Dissensions, factions, and heresies have sometimes afflicted Congregational churches, as they have churches of other polities; but, it is believed, to a less extent in width and depth and permanency of malign influence. Congregationalism keeps the troubles of each church at home, or at most in its immediate vicinity, and precribes its healing remedies to be applied at home. And, in such cases, to heal the wounds of the

body of Christ superficially by some powerful exterior application, while the sore remains, and the poison continues festering beneath the surface thinly skinned over, — as political craft is wont to do with its hollow-hearted compromises, — is not a wise way of healing difficulties in any church. The more excellent way — the normal and spiritual way of Congregationalism — is to endeavor, with its vital spirit of brotherly love, to remove the deep-seated cause of the difficulty in the church or in the individual.

3. Congregationalism, not being a system of dead rigid forms, can bend without being broken; and can thus accommodate itself provisionally to the condition of communities and nascent churches, in regard to degrees and differences of mental and moral culture, civilization, social manners, forms of civil government, and other like things. Congregationalism, like Christianity and the apostle Paul, to a certain extent can become all things to all men, if by any means the salvation of men may be secured. And our missionaries find it expedient and indispensable

to do this to some extent, in regard to the polity and government of the mission churches. See the memorial volume of the A. B. C. F. M., chapter VI. Thus even Congregational ministers, *doing the work of evangelists*, may consistently and do properly assume the functions of provisional diocesans during the pupilage of these nascent churches.

But it is only provisionally. As the members of such a church grow in grace and in Christian experience and stability, they are wisely intrusted more and more with the administration of their own church affairs. The missionary still exercises a fraternal watch and care over them ; and they naturally look up to him for counsel and instruction : while, meantime, by the educating influences of the system gradually adopted, they are being trained into Congregational self-government, and into the healthy, vigorous, and manly tone of personal piety and activity already mentioned. And by the time when the missionary can safely commit the oversight of the church into the hands of a pastor chosen by themselves,



Congregationalism becomes the best system of polity for that church, as it is for all mature churches everywhere, who intelligently adopt its spirit, principles, and forms. For true religion is seen to flourish, and has flourished, under other forms of polity, just in proportion as they have imbibed the vital spirit, and carried out in their own way the fundamental idea of Congregationalism, — namely the spirit of brotherly love, and the idea of the church as a brotherhood of the regenerate children of God.

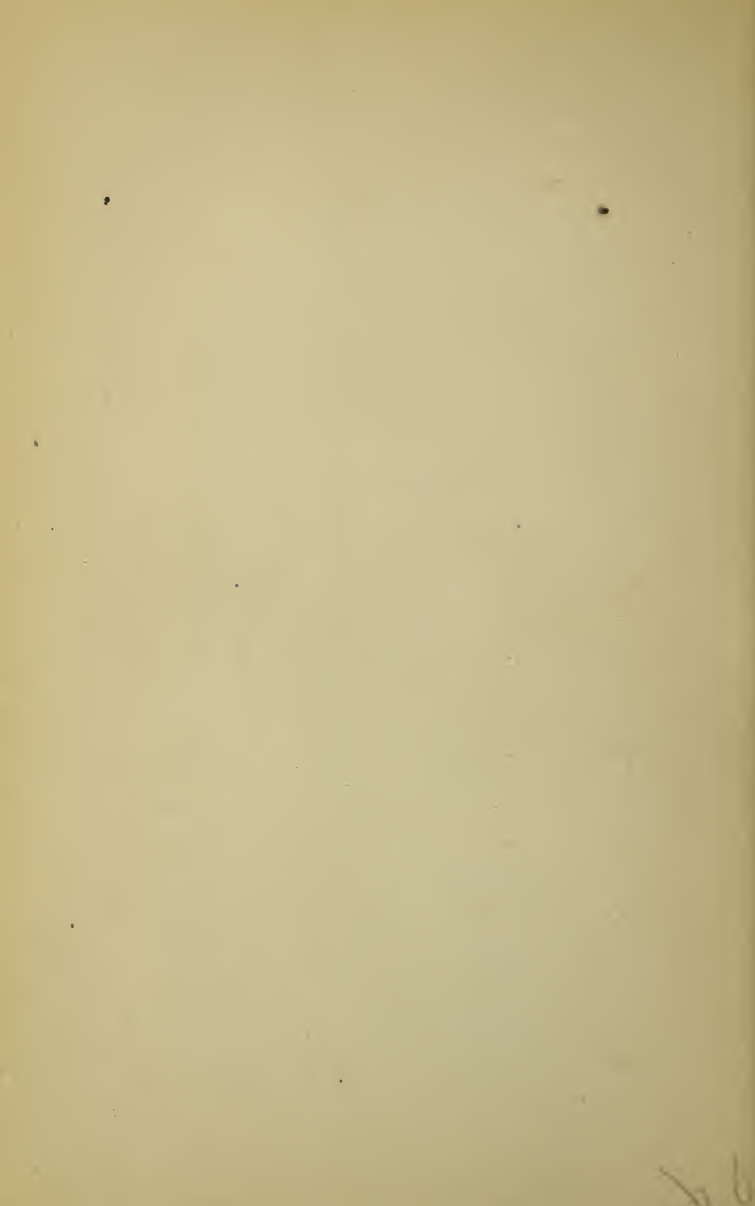
4. Finally, Congregationalism is favorable to civil freedom and republican government in the State, and is eminently conducive thereunto. It presents the fundamental, germinal idea of such government in the simplest form possible. Its churches are free communities and self-governed, yet owing and acknowledging allegiance to the higher law and authority of the Most High, who ruleth over the nations. Just such a pattern of government is the one needed to be seen and understood, adopted and realized, in every nation on earth, as soon as the people shall have been

prepared fully for it by the gospel. The beneficial influence of Congregationalism hitherto, in this direction, is now frankly acknowledged by historians on both sides of the Atlantic. If you inquire for its monument in America, look around you, especially in New England, and wherever New-England men and institutions have gone. And abroad, among the nations, what do we now see looming up in the near and more remote future? We see the thrones of the old despotisms, both the civil and the sacerdotal, tottering to their fall by being assailed and undermined by the one idea, the radical and generic idea, of brotherhood as the basis of civil government in the State, as it is normally in the churches of the living God on earth. And with this we see looming up in the minds of statesmen, the conviction that the fraternal spirit is the true policy in civil governments and between nations, as it is normally in and among Congregational churches. Whether the organic forms of republican and congregational institutions will ever prevail all over the earth or not, yet undoubtedly in the

latter day the civil governments will be deeply imbued with the fraternal idea and spirit which Congregationalism exhibits and promotes. "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" by his prophet (Isa. xi. 1-9).

















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Fleming, A.  
Church polity.

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